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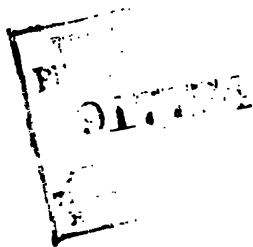
CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND

THE MYSTERY OF HARTLEY HOUSE

BY
CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND



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THE MYSTERY OF HARTLEY HOUSE

THE MYSTERY OF HARTLEY HOUSE

CHAPTER I

RAIN had been falling for five days when I first saw Hartley House. The place had so much local distinction that a village not far from the estate was named Hartley, for it.

Even when drenched and dripping in a storm which had lasted for five days in late May, the spot was beautiful and charming; it had antiquity, that rare thing in a new land. Its two thousand acres, handsomely arranged for decorative and agricultural purposes, lay along the river-bank, with an indented and interesting littoral where the river was two miles wide.

I had been an interne in St. Julian's Hospital, and at the close of my last year Dr. Brownell had asked me if my arrangements would make it possible for me to undertake a case which he thought might be profitable and interesting to a young physician. It was that of Mr. Homer Sidney, the owner of Hartley House.

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"I never saw so strong a will to live," said the Doctor when he discussed the circumstances with me. "The old man is indomitable. For that reason he is interesting. He lives because he wills to live, for some tremendous reason of which I know nothing. It is enormous. You may live to see him die; I am afraid I shall not—and he is seventy and I am fifty."

There was debate in my mind whether I should undertake the case. I had no certain prospects. I was exposed to the trying circumstances of a young practitioner. My opportunity was to be Dr. Brownell's assistant, resident upon a case which needed attention he could give only in emergency.

I decided to accept. It may have been professional weakness, but in addition to the financial certainty offered, there was a professional interest aroused. If Dr. Brownell were attracted by a human being's will to live, there certainly was something superhumanly interesting about that human being. I took the position, which was merely to continue as interne in a home hospital of one patient.

The recollection of Hartley as I first saw it remains as an enduring impression. The long downpour of rain had given the place a spiritual accent. One felt as if the soul were saturated.

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It is only occasionally in a normal mind that weather works a spiritual effect. I thought my mind was normal, but I felt the spiritual depression. Yet the landscape was wonderful. I never have seen more of art and nature joined in this country. It was alien—it was alien because it had an obvious background. Time had worked with it; many generations of people had lived in and for it.

I took a buggy at the village livery-stable to ride out. The driver said they would put my trunk in a cart the next day and bring it out. For the evening they had nothing but a buggy and a tired horse.

The way for three miles was through ordinary American small-farm land. Then it changed abruptly. Antiquity began to show. The driver said we were in the Hartley House grounds.

I was so depressed by the rain, by my own uncertainty, by thinking over the decision I had made and seemed about to regret, by the dismal prospects—or at least the uncertain prospects—that I should have been glad for any sustaining human association. At the end of my journey I soon found such association and was thereafter happy in it, but approaching the place I was apprehensive. My driver had been, if not unapproachable, at least stupid and dismal.

It somewhat astonished me when suddenly he

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began to talk. We were then about a half-mile from the House.

"I wish you had come an hour earlier," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm not a coward," said the driver, "—at least, no more than usual, but I don't like to be in here alone, and I've got to go home alone."

In a fashion he expressed what might have been my mood if I had known more of the place. I could sympathise with him. The rain had done this for me.

"What have you to be afraid of?" I asked.

"Nothing in particular," he said. "I don't believe what they say of this place at all, but even if you don't believe in a thing, you'll keep thinking about it. I don't believe in ghosts. I never saw one, and I don't expect to see one. I don't intend to see one if I can help it."

"Is something haunted around here?" I asked. It seemed as if so beautiful a spot ought to have this interest. He stopped his horse.

"I'm going back out of here like a scared pig," he said, "—that is, if the old horse can stand it. But you're going to live here for a while, and I'll stop a minute to show you where they say the ghost walks."

He pointed to where the river had eaten a substantial bit out of the bank, making a pool or tiny

bay. The road, swerving toward the river here, was within thirty feet of it.

"It isn't natural for a man to kill his brother," said my driver, "and something unnatural comes of it. A man killed his brother there, and something unnatural has come of it. That's why I'll be just as well satisfied to get you to the house and myself back out of here before dark. I'm not superstitious or afraid, but I'd just as soon not be here after dark, because you never know when things come back."

"Get along, then," I said. "They don't interest me. It looks like an ordinary place to me."

"To me too," said my driver. "And I don't want it ever to look extraordinary."

"Who was killed there?" I asked.

"You'll learn the story soon enough," said the driver, "if you're going to stay in this house. You'll learn it better than I can tell you."

At the great coach-entrance of the old house I paid the driver and let him go. He was anxious to be gone. It was growing dark. Then I began ringing the bell.

At the third ringing there was a response, in the form of a servant, a man, butler or door-man, past middle age. He was crusty.

"What do you want?" he asked.

I explained that I was Dr. Michelson and wanted nothing that I was not wanted for. I did not like

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his manner and was not inclined to ignore it or to propitiate him as ordinarily one would. He had, at first sight, an extraordinary power of exasperation. At the time I did not understand my weakness, but afterward I did. The man was abnormal as an irritant.

Thus my appearance at Hartley House was so unfortunate that if the servant's contumacy and my resentment had had another moment, the door would have been slammed in my face and I should have been walking back to Hartley Station. At that hesitant moment in my fortunes, a woman's voice intervened.

"Jed," it said, "who's there?"

The servant opened the door wider, and I saw a lady, a South American, I thought.

"I am Dr. Michelson," I said.

"Yes, Doctor," she replied, "we have been expecting you. I am Mrs. Sidney. Where is your baggage?"

"I have only a hand-bag with me here," I said.

"Come in," she said, "Jed will take it."

He did, but made me see the ill nature of his reception of me and of his duty. He had also, at the direction of Mrs. Sidney, to show me to my quarters.

"Jed," I said, in my room, "we have not made the best start for two people who may have to live together for some time."

I offered him a dollar as a peace-offering.

"Are you going to stay here?" he asked.

"I am supposed to," I said.

"A dollar won't make you welcome," he said and left me looking at the coin in my hand.

I was called to dinner and had it alone in a large dining-room. When I had finished, a maid told me that Mr. Sidney would be glad to see me if it were convenient for me—that he did not need me professionally, but that socially he would be delighted if I could come to him.

He was sitting in a large armchair in a great room with a great fireplace. Later I perceived the fascinating details of the room, but just then Mr. Sidney had all my attention.

Dr. Brownell had told me of the remarkable will to live which I should find. It was instantly apparent. The old man was wonderfully alive. He was abrupt but smilingly and charmingly courteous. We talked for a quarter of an hour, casually. Then he said:

"I know you are tired, Doctor."

"Not at all," I said, interested to see more of him if I might.

"That's your good nature," he said. "And we certainly do not want to wear you out in one day. We only wanted to see you. We shall get better acquainted, and we hope you'll like us and be comfortable and happy here. We have a fashion

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of trying to be happy. We are going to say good night and allow you to settle yourself to new surroundings in privacy. It is the kindest thing we can do. Jed will show you to your room.—Jed, take care of Dr. Michelson. Good night, Doctor.”

Mrs. Sidney stood beside Mr. Sidney as he was speaking. I had thought at first seeing her that she had been very beautiful and that now she was very unhappy. Seeing her again, I retained my first impressions.

Jed preceded me through corridors to my door and left me surlily. As he closed the door, I thought I heard another sound than that of the clicking of the latch. I had. It was the throwing of a bolt on the outside: Jed had locked me in. I made sure of this by trying the door. It could not be opened. Here was an astonishing situation for a first night in a place. My impulse was to make a noise and ask for an explanation, but on second thought I did not. My room was on the second floor, and I saw, looking out of the window, that it would not be impossible to make a descent on the outside in an emergency. I decided not to begin my stay with a protest against any habits of the house or occurrences in it. In the night, I was awakened out of a sound sleep with an idea that I had been disturbed by noises, but nothing I could hear sustained it, and I went to sleep again.

CHAPTER II

I WAS up early, dressed and found that my door had been unbolted. I examined the outside of it for a bolt and had difficulty in finding one, so ingeniously had it been concealed. The knob seemed a part of the decoration of the panel, and the bolt was of thin steel. I found it only by finding the socket into which it could be shot.

Although the fact that I could open the door was evidence that some one had been there early to release me, the house was not yet astir, so far as I could see.

The rain had stopped, and although the woods were dripping, there was a glorious, radiant sunlight. The effect was exhilarating. It worked a spiritual change. Orioles, a thrush, catbirds and tanagers were singing in the near-by woods. Man, said the morning, was made to be happy.

Exulting in pleasant emotions, I let myself out of the main door and rejoiced in the beauty of the place and the moment. Two mastiffs came running toward me from the lawn. They were friendly and seemed to accept me because I appeared from within the house. I took a short walk across the

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lawn toward the woods. The dogs followed me. Then a gardener came with chains and led them away. He asked me if I were the new doctor and said if I had leisure during the day he wished I would come to the cottage beyond the gardens. His infant had a cough.

The house was astir when I reëntered. Jed was the first person I saw, and to my astonishment he was not only civil but pleasant and candid.

"Did you have a fair night, Doctor?" he asked. "Sometimes a first night in a new place is disturbed, and I owe you apologies. We have had here occasion at times for locking doors on the outside as well as on the inside, and last night I forgot myself and threw the bolt of your door. I am occasionally in liquor, and last night I had a touch too much."

I smiled at his candour and said something jokingly in comment.

"A servant can't be blamed, Doctor, for that," he said, "if his master leads him into it. We have coffee before breakfast. I'll serve you anywhere. The morning papers are in the library. There's a porch off it with a good view. It's my favourite spot of a morning. I recommend that you have your coffee there."

His friendliness was amusing, but I found his suggestion good, and being fond of coffee, enjoyed it with a half-hour of magnificent view and a

cigarette. The morning was odorous after the rain.

When I had time that day to look at the house and visit the grounds, I was the more impressed by them. I am, it may be confessed, of a romantic temperament which, I have reason to believe, is disguised by methodical habit.

The house was a charming structural disorder of L's and wings, porches and balconies. It was very old, and one could see where different generations had contributed to its growth. The walls were backgrounds for hollyhocks or support for climbing roses or ivy. It had plenty of sunlight, but dense white-oak woods came close up. They were thickened by viburnum and witch hazel, and except where lanes ran through them, seemed impenetrable.

I held myself in readiness to attend my patient at his convenience, but it was ten o'clock before I was summoned. Mr. Sidney was pleasant and animated.

"We must arrive at a schedule," I suggested. "This is a little too late in the day to satisfy Dr. Brownell's ideas of what my duties are."

"But, my dear Doctor," he said, "I do not wake until nine. I need my sleep. I do not go to sleep until one."

"I should advise early hours," I said.

"Of course you would, but you must remember

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that you are dealing with a man, at the end of his life, trying to make the most of it. I like to remain awake late."

"Then you must," I said. "I shall consider it settled to see you at ten."

"And, I hope, sometimes to sit up with me until one. Do you like chess?"

"I never played."

"Luckily Jed does, just well enough to interest me and have me beat him. Do you like wine?"

"A young doctor does not drink."

"Luckily Jed does. It is a great satisfaction to have some one whom you can beat at chess and whom you can see enjoying wine. Doctor, I have yielded to my friend Brownell's demand for constant attention, but as you can see, there will not be a great deal for a physician to do. I eat well, I sleep well, and so long as my sensations are pleasant, I want to live. They are not always pleasant, but mostly they are so. I'd like to have you as a new friend in the house. I like to be talked to. I like to be read to. Will you relax and be just a friend?"

"With pleasure," I said, "so long as nothing interferes with the physician."

"That's a bargain," he said. "At three o'clock this afternoon you shall read to me."

During my spare time I walked about the grounds. A part of the estate, about thirty acres,

which seemed to be architecturally intimate and related to the house, was completely inclosed by a twelve-foot brick wall surmounted by sharp spikes. It was built beyond the river's edge, and was continued out into the water in a heavily buttressed fashion. Only a good swimmer could have rounded it and come into the place. It looked like a carefully but strangely designed protection.

In the dog-kennels were the mastiffs I had found loose that morning, and a number of Airedales. I said to Jed that it seemed as if precautions had been taken against a perceived danger. He had been affable during the day, but his face clouded instantly.

"The wall was here when Mr. Sidney bought the place, but we are in a way isolated," he said shortly. "It is reasonable to take precautions. It will be a precaution for you not to go roaming the grounds at night. The dogs are not friendly then."

His surliness was easily passed over. I was good-humoured and wished to prove it.

"I have heard of the haunted bay," I said. "What is its story?"

"Every fool in and about the place talks of that," he said. "You'll get too much of the story only too soon. But that isn't why we have the dogs. We don't take any stock in ghosts in this house."

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He was offended and went away. At three o'clock I saw my patient again, and he wanted me to read to him. The room in which he sat was walled with bookshelves.

"Anything in particular?" I asked.

He asked for "The Master of Ballantrae."

"It's not your first time at it," I suggested.

"No," he said, "I have it read once every three or four months."

I read to him for an hour. Then he took a nap.

I had been told that any time I wanted to go to the town I might tell one of the chauffeurs to take me. I needed a thin file for the bolt on my door. It annoyed me. I did not ask that whoever threw it at night should know that it was gone. It suited my purposes better that it should be gone and the person who used it should think it was still there. Therefore, after reading to Mr. Sidney, I went to town for a thin file.

One sees a landscape the first time without perception. On reseeing, perception begins. Real perception is a matter of familiarity and study. The second time over the road to Hartley helped to familiarise me with it, and I could see that with a closer acquaintance greater beauty would be disclosed.

The first aspect of beauty may so suggest its remoteness, its spiritual distance from the observer's possession and expectation as to produce

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in a sensitive mind the unrest, the real pain, of a desire for the unattainable. Certainly the beauty of a landscape grows warmer, glows more brightly, as it is taken into the memory by association and experience.

I got my file, and for greater sociability on the return-trip I took the seat beside Charles, the driver. The landscape became jovial and human. The wood-thrush was singing to the twilight, and the wonderful odours of a fresh and human soil rich with the experiences of many generations came kindly to perceptive senses.

As we passed the pool, Charles referred to it.

"What is it?" I asked. "What's the story?"

"A man killed his brother there," said Charles. "He is now in the penitentiary at Alwick for life. His brother's ghost, they say, comes back. I've never seen it, but some people say they have."

"Who were the brothers?" I asked.

"They were the sons of the people who used to own this place—the Dobsons." He did not say anything more of it and I did not question him.

I used the file on my bolt, leaving one end of it in the socket. It could be thrown, but it could not bar the door.

CHAPTER III

THAT evening I had dinner with Mrs. Sidney and her daughter Isobel. I had been in the house twenty-four hours and did not know there was a daughter until dinner brought the three of us together.

Mrs. Sidney was Spanish. She was a lovely woman, gracious and charming, but I thought there was a great deal of steel hidden in her disposition. She did not seem to ask that life be soft or to expect to find it so. She had a Roman dignity of self-respect which did not, I could be sure, permit moaning. Mrs. Sidney would face life unflattered and uncomplaining. I could see that instantly, and not only that: she had been meeting a troubled life unfalteringly.

I do not know what gave me the idea that her greatest distress was one of conscience, that she had in some fashion or other offended against her true self and that she had done so for some one else. It would not have taxed any one's perceptions to recognise in Mrs. Sidney a human being living an extraordinary life. The fact was so apparent that it seemed a part of her personality.

It must be remembered that I had come to Hart-

ley House prepared for abnormalities. There was first, the man with the wonderful will to live which had interested Dr. Brownell. There was, then, the soul-saturating rain which met me. There was the alien beauty of the House, the strange servant Jed, the haunted pool,—insignificant as it was, to a rational being,—the lovely woman who was so apparently a tragic figure. There was the fact of my being locked in my room the first night. There were the forbidding defences of the place—walls, dogs and keepers. I may be excused for taking a fanciful view of my new surroundings.

Then there was Miss Sidney—Isobel. She came into the dining-room an unexpected if not astonishing phenomenon to me, who did not know that there was a daughter in the family.

Mrs. Sidney presented me.

“How do you do?” said Miss Sidney, and she seemed to find it tiresome that a stranger had taken a place at the table. I felt very awkward, and being obnoxiously diffident, I had a bad time of it.

Jed served us, and the dinner was excellent. I saw that the establishment was latitudinarian. Although the ladies had only a glass of sherry each, I was offered a variety of liquors. My habit is abstemious except upon rare occasions, but I was so embarrassed by Miss Sidney’s boredom that I took two glasses of champagne, and they made me a more tolerable dinner-companion. It was

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some champagne-stimulated remark on feminism which caused Miss Sidney to stare at me as if I were an animal which, being smooth-skinned, suddenly had grown a coat of fur.

She stared for an instant and then laughed. She was quite frank. She had been bored; she had become interested. I could see that she distressed her mother. Mrs. Sidney, any one could know, held to conventions as the salvation of life; Miss Sidney did not.

I had a comfortable little glow of egotism, having interested this young woman in myself, and having lost all diffidence. Luckily I managed to be less of a bore to the daughter without being more of a scandal to the mother.

Isobel Sidney was a very attractive girl. I guessed her age to be twenty-three. I also guessed that candour and honesty were outstanding points in her disposition. Her youth and her beauty were magnetic, and I must confess that my romanticism was touched instantly. I had seen just enough of Mr. Sidney to understand how this girl could be the daughter of Mrs. Sidney.

By the time dinner was over we had found a pleasant agreement in ideas and taste. I was in an ecstasy, full of the sensation which comes to a diffident man, unaccustomed to women, when he dares to think for the first time that he has been interesting to a young and beautiful girl. It is

one of the Elysian emotions. We grow old and bald, and women are adventures dismissed from our lives. We know we do not interest them. We do not think of interesting them. We become pantalooned lay-figures too scared of scandal or too confirmed in propriety to break out of the narrowed way. There is an age which comes to a man, a condition in which he finds himself, to which he submits if he have any morals, and when it comes and when he submits, the gates are closed upon fanciful, romantic adventures. If he has been fortunate, he is content. He sits at the west window, and his prospect is the sunset. He no longer asks the great question of youth: "Could I make that girl like me?"

To me, after that first dinner with Mrs. Sidney and her daughter, the ecstasy was a romantic folly. Isobel had captured me, my sense, my rationality, my judgment, my mind, fancy and emotions. Beauty and youth alone are enough to do this for an imaginative young man, and when attractive aspects of character are back of beauty and youth, and when the young man looks forward to a probability of that conquering circumstance, propinquity, he may be excused if his feet lightly touch the floor. I was captured and knew it after that first dinner—knew it, and both loved and dreaded it. I was about to make a fool of myself and be at once a happy and a miserable fool.

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In the exalted state of egoistic emotions which I have outlined, I went to Mr. Sidney's room after dinner and sat with him for two hours. I began to appreciate how charmingly his life was decorated. A really rare subtlety of art was used to bring a warm colour into this indomitable but feeble man's winter of life. I did not fully appreciate until later what thought and care lay behind the unstudied comforts and sensations Hartley House offered.

Mr. Sidney was white-haired and very gracious. His manner was a warm cordiality. It was not precise. It was robust, but it was benignant. Later I saw how his presence pervaded the place.

We had a cheerful talk. What he said suggested to me that my world could not have been more than a hundred years old at the most, and that his included the period of inorganic evolution in which the period of organic evolution is but a pin-prick. Youth is startled by such conceptions of life, but I had an interesting evening.

Before I said good night, Jed came in with two bottles of wine. He stood and looked at me unpleasantly. I arose to go, and Mr. Sidney said:

"I think we shall like each other. At least, I hope you will be comfortable, even happy. As I don't be distressed about the wine. I don't drink it any more. Jed drinks it, and I enjoy seeing him do it."

CHAPTER IV

A WHIPPOORWILL was reiterant in the woods at night, and its call came from dark recesses odorous and mysteriously veiled. Having said good night to Mr. Sidney, I had gone to my room with a book from the library. The night was fresh, sweet-smelling and cool. I had read for several hours when I heard the cut bolt in my door thrown against the piece of metal which had been left in the socket.

There was no transom above the door, and evidently the threshold kept light from appearing beneath it. I had been reading, as I said, for three hours at least, and whoever tried to bolt me in had good reason to think I was asleep. The person could have made certain by going out on the lawn and looking up at my windows, but evidently was sure I was sleeping.

I knew who the person was. It was Jed. Knowing I was not locked in, I was undisturbed and continued reading.

Shortly afterward I heard a woman's voice in expostulation far down the hall. It arose abruptly to a sharp cry, and I had to lay aside my book and expose the fact that my door was not locked, a

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thing I had not wanted to do until the secret of its being locked could be discovered by revealing that it was not.

I hurried out and down the hall. Jed had a woman by the wrist. Both of them saw me coming. She released herself from his relaxing grip by a quick jerk and ran. He stood until I came up.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"What makes you think anything is the matter?" he asked.

"Don't take me for a fool," I said. "That was Mrs. Sidney who screamed. You were holding her. It seems to me it needs an explanation."

"Who are you that you need an explanation?" said Jed.

"You are drunk again."

"I know I am. If that's satisfactory to my employer, why should it bother you?"

"I doubt that it is satisfactory to your employer that you should be making his wife scream at midnight. Look here: you're a servant in this house. What have you to say for yourself? I'm going to have an explanation of this."

Jed had been surly and angry, but now he grinned.

"All right," he said, "but if you want to be decent about it, ask Mrs. Sidney first whether she wants your help and your asking. That's my ad-

vice, young fellow. And while we're asking, how did you get out of your room? You're not supposed to be out. We don't want people in this house running around the halls at this time of night."

"I opened the door and came out. Why shouldn't I come out! I heard a scream and came."

He looked at me as if he were doubting himself. I think he was uncertain whether he had thrown the bolt or not. I think he decided that he had not, although I was afraid that I had disclosed my independence prematurely. If I were being locked in for a purpose, it was unfortunate for me to reveal the true situation until by revealing it I could defeat the purpose. It transpired later that I was right in thinking Jed doubted himself and concluded that he had not locked me in, but for the time I was worried.

When I went back to my room, I was restless, as one naturally would be, a stranger in so strange a house. It was impossible to sleep and difficult to read. I sat by the window and alternately dozed and read until day broke and the wood-thrush began to sing. Then, quieted, I went to bed and had two hours' sleep.

I thought it wise to speak to Mrs. Sidney about the incident of the night. She had seen me; she knew I had talked to Jed; she might or might not

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know that I recognised her. I might add to her perplexities by speaking to her, but I might obtain an insight into matters which would enable me to act discreetly and usefully. If I remained ignorant of motives prevailing in the house, I might at any time blunder into a serious mistake. It seemed best to speak to Mrs. Sidney. She had the explanation, and although I felt reluctant to risk increasing her troubles and adding to her pain, there was nothing to be gained, so far as I could see, in not facing the facts. I knew enough to realise that Jed occupied some position of strength and that he was abusing his power and, new and strange as I was to the place and its people, I thought I must do what I could.

Mrs. Sidney, I could see when I spoke to her, had been greatly disturbed, but she was Roman.

"It was nothing serious or important, Doctor," she said. "I'll not say that it was pleasant or that I liked it, but it had no significance. Jed is a faithful and invaluable servant. He has a vice for which he is not responsible. He was a perfectly sober man when he came to us, and if he isn't now, it is our own fault. My husband corrupted him without intending to do so. My husband, when he was well and strong, loved to drink wine. He drank it in great quantities and without any disturbance of his sobriety or good nature. It mellowed and at the time intensified life for him. He

cannot use it now, on account of his health, but he enjoys seeing the use of it, and Jed has been made the victim of Mr. Sidney's vicarious enjoyment. Jed is not always considerate of his position when he is not sober, but he never is dangerous, not even when, like last night, he is exceedingly annoying."

I admired the lady's resolution and fortitude, but I did not think she was telling the truth—not all of it.

"That was the first time anything of the kind ever occurred," she said. "I am sorry it disturbed you. I met Jed in the hall. He was not sober, and he had a preposterous request to make. When he has spent such an evening with Mr. Sidney, he resents being a servant in the family. He wants to be accepted as a member of the family."

"I have had something to do with that," I suggested.

"No doubt it has inflamed his egotism to have you enter the family. The situation with him is difficult. His pride was hurting him last night. He had lost all sense of proportion. He was like a child. He remonstrated with me: he was too important as Mr. Sidney's crony to be merely our servant! It was only a drunken mood, but he forgot himself and grasped me by the wrist. I had been trying to control him and restore his common sense. Then I became indignant, and you heard

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my voice. I am afraid it was shrill, but I was not alarmed. I was merely indignant."

"You speak of Jed, Mrs. Sidney," I said, "as if he were merely an annoying alcoholic, tolerated when he is annoying, because of his general usefulness; but that does not explain why he tries to lock me in my room while he is sober and before these disturbances begin. That shows design and intent to have a free hand when he makes the disturbance. I do not like being locked in my room."

"It is outrageous," said the lady nervously. "I did not know that it was done. I shall see that it is not repeated."

"I am not so sure you can," I said, "and I wish you would not try. I have protected myself against it, and I'd rather Jed did not give me any more thought than he thinks is necessary now."

"I am sure, Doctor," said Mrs. Sidney, "that you will understand Jed and the situation better when you have been here longer. It may be annoying to you now, but we all here live for the pleasure and comfort of Mr. Sidney, who is worthy of all we can do for him. He did everything he could for us while he was active, and if thoughts would benefit us, he would be working for us now."

Mrs. Sidney was determined to protect the secret of the situation, and I had no right to cross-examine her. The next time I went to town I bought myself a forty-five-calibre pistol.



CHAPTER V

ALTHOUGH I was prepared for recurrent disturbances, there were none. Within a week I had found my way into a pleasant routine. Jed seemed to be conscious that he had overstepped his bounds. He was not apparently contrite, but he was cautious. I asked Mrs. Sidney why Mr. Sidney's authority should not be used as a check upon the man's behaviour.

"That is the last thing that could be thought of," she said.

Jed held himself in check, and a week was without incident. Then Miss Sidney went away to make a visit. Her absence was a spiritual disaster. Ecstatic and morose youth! The beauty of Hartley House became a hollow and dark melancholy, making sad sounds. Vibrant life had gone from it. Its perfume was lost.

I cannot now tell quite what it was that made Hartley House, a place so comfortable and genial, at the same time a place so threatened. The threat could not be ignored: it was there. The story of the ghost at the haunted pool could have nothing to do with it. The threat had tangible aspects. Mrs. Sidney's worry, unspoken but graven in her

resolutely Roman face, was one evidence. The extraordinary behaviour of Jed was another. The atmosphere of the place was one of mystery.

During the pleasant, peaceful, odorous summer months, when our life was one of undisturbed routine, I never escaped the sense of dread. I hoped the intangible would take shape; surely something intangible that would be embodied, hung over the house.

I may not be able to make this certainty appear so vividly to you as it did to me. It permeated; it was in the atmosphere; it hung over the woods; it filled the house. It came with the odours of blossoms; it was expressed in the summer winds; it was threatened in the lightning which flashed over the river. I could not reconcile this effect to such a cause as that feeble ghost-story of the pool. I could not dread that ghost or feel its presence. It was a benevolent ghost needed for decoration.

Every place with an obvious indication of many years of habitation, with great lilacs and old pines, with numerous hollyhocks and deep moss, ought to have a ghost-story. Shall all the human beings who must have lived in such a place have passed away leaving no spiritual vestige of their lives? Let one, at least, loving or hating the place, inhabit it, benevolently or malevolently.

I felt that Hartley House was old enough to yield a tribute to human permanency, and that to

do so it must have a ghost, some spirit interested enough to come back and occasionally be tangible in some one's imagination. The story of the pool had been merely a tale, but as the place grew in romantic interest, the need of such a story grew. I wanted it to go with the ivy and the evergreens. How did the pool get its reputation? Was it only the conventional consequence of the fratricidal crime committed at a lonely spot? Was it built of nothing more than gossip? Had it no other consistency than old women's talk and children's fears?

I asked the people of the house, the servants, and found that for them it was largely a superstition. They all had been brought from the city, and only a few, such as Jed, a gardener, the housekeeper and the cook had been long enough in the house really to be associated with it.

Jed was the only one that willingly would be in the vicinity of the pool at night. The others might laugh at the suggestion of terror, but they would not willingly test their superiority to superstition. If they had been really frightened, they could not have been kept in service. They were not. The place was large, comfortably inhabited and genial. There was a touch of dread at one spot. They avoided the spot, and it was negligible so long as they did avoid it.

In the small town of Hartley there was more of

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the legend than there was at Hartley House. To the people who lived at a distance and came in contact with the place only on occasions, it had an alien, exotic air. Mr. and Mrs. Sidney had come from South America, from Montevideo, where they had lived many years. The circumstances of their selection and purchase of the place were normal, but the villagers spiced a great deal of gossip with notions of the alienism, wealth, aloofness and odd habits, concerning which gossip ran from our servants to the Hartley householders.

A latitudinarian, Lucullian family, such as the Sidney family, would be strangely interpreted in a little village. Therefore, in the village, the legend of a ghost at Hartley House was more real than it was on the place. The house was a much more genial human fact than the village. Consequently it was not, so far as I could discover, a valid reason for a ghost-story.

I have mentioned that my first morning at Hartley House a gardener asked me to see one of his children, which had a bad cough. The man had a good deal of sickness in his family in the next few months, and I was of considerable service. One child had measles, another an alarming attack of croup, and a third, his oldest son, broke an arm in falling out of a tree.

The gardener's name was Williamson. He had been on the place almost from the time of Mr.

Sidney's purchase of it. He was attached to it, proud of his work and fond of it and its results. He had a neat little cottage beyond the gardens. His wife was very pleasant and thought too much of my services. Williamson himself was a fine man, and I am interested in gardening. Consequently, having to visit the family every day or every other day, I formed a habit of talking with him.

When, by chance, I spoke of the ghost-story to Williamson, with no more purpose than I ever had had in these inquiries, I noticed that he was a bit embarrassed.

"I am not a superstitious man, Doctor," he said.

"Neither am I," I said. "I think we miss something by not being."

"I take no stock in the stories about the pool," he said. "I'd just as lief pass it at midnight as midday—almost."

"Be honest, Williamson," I suggested laughingly.

"Almost, I said," he replied. "But I did see something at the pool."

He was a straightforward, unimaginative sort of man. I was sure he was not about to indulge in romance.

"I know something of these stories," he said. "I have not gossiped mine about—I was coming

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from town late—after midnight. It was the second year of our being here. It was in the fall or late summer—I do not remember. As I came along the road by the pool, I saw the figure of a man standing by the edge of the river. It was light enough for me to see that the figure was leaning on a stick or cane. I stopped and was going to call out, but for some reason—I don't know just why—I didn't. The figure did not move. I began to feel creepy and went on as gently as I could. Fifty feet farther, I heard a rustling in the brush and I thought I saw a face. I couldn't be sure, but I thought I did. I know I heard a rustling. When I got out in the open, I ran the rest of the way home on the turf."

"There was nothing very alarming about that," I suggested. My romance needed more substance. "You saw a man and heard a noise."

"There was nothing in seeing a man and hearing a noise," said Williamson. "It was the effect."

"That was due to the hour and the place."

"No, I'm not superstitious. I was not thinking of the place. The man on the bank was different from a man. I could not see why. I didn't think he was a man. It was not because I was scared—at first. I became scared as I looked at him. He did not move. He did not seem to be alive. When

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I felt shivers starting up and down my back, I knew I was scared. Then when I heard the rustling, I went home as quickly and quietly as I could."

CHAPTER VI

JED certainly was the most significant disagreeable fact in the house, and his influence the most significant malignancy. He had been sobered by the discovery of his attack upon Mrs. Sidney, but as he began to recover from his discomfiture, and as the sense of caution began to lessen, he again asserted, or suggested, control, particularly when he was drunk. He never allowed Mr. Sidney to know this. In their strange association at Horatian wine-feasts, Jed was tactful, respectful, considerate and jovial.

To Mrs. Sidney he was at times courteous and thoughtful, at other times disrespectful or even brutal. Sometimes he seemed to frighten himself. When I saw that he was again beginning to show disrespect for her, I was for putting an end to it. Mrs. Sidney was horrified when I said that Jed could be brought to terms. She held up her hands.

"No, no," she said. "Not in any event! Never, please, speak to Mr. Sidney. Please never think of it. Jed is invaluable to Mr. Sidney. He is not so discourteous to me as you might think. He is gruff, and drinking does not make him better,

but it is Mr. Sidney's whim that he should drink. It would be unjust—don't you see it would be unjust?—to make a point against him of behaviour that Mr. Sidney causes. Please never mention it."

She was very much in earnest and was not satisfied until she had my promise that I never would speak to Mr. Sidney of Jed until I had her consent. She then showed relief, and I felt more distressed. Jed had some hold on this resolute lady that I should have liked to break.

Jed's attitude towards me was a thing to drive distracted a person who cared what it was. I did not. He could be interesting, and then I was interested in him. He could be stupid, and I avoided him. He could be surly, and I ignored him. He could be quarrelsome, and I fought him back.

It seldom was a matter of sobriety or insobriety with him. He was best natured to me at times when he was most intoxicated. He was surliest at times when he was perfectly sober. At other times he quite reversed this. One never knew from his physical condition what his disposition might be at the time.

He served at dinner when Mrs. Sidney, Isobel and I, more ceremoniously than we cared to, dined. Certain domestic ceremonies pleased Mr. Sidney and he liked to know that in some respects the baronial character of his place was being main-

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tained as he would have maintained it if he had been active.

He thought form was valuable in passionate, careless human existence, and that it softened terrors, conquered animalism and dignified life. No doubt he was right, but the ceremonies sometimes were more than three people would have chosen for their own comfort. Jed when a servant—he seemed to recognise occasions when he was and occasions when he was not—was beyond reproach, but I knew the satisfaction he had behind the proprieties in which he could mask his face. He limited our conversation. He made Mrs. Sidney unhappy. He had Isobel bored, and he had me either manifestly unhappy or hiddenly furious. He was pleased to distress us by being our perfect servant. It was sheer malevolence.

When he was in good nature, he frequently sought me out for talks, and when he was in good nature, I encouraged him. I did not want to open up any secrets the house might have, merely to learn what they were, but I knew Mrs. Sidney needed help, and I thought I might give it if I knew how. I also thought that Jed some evening when pleasantly and good-naturedly drunk and garrulous might say more than he intended. There were many opportunities, but he never did.

One night—this was in September—I was walking about the place with the mastiffs at my side.

I stood a while at the edge of the woods looking at the house. In its shadowy bulk it seemed fit container of mystery. Only a few windows were illuminated. It was the river side of the house that was bright at night.

I walked slowly across the lawn toward the side where Mrs. Sidney's rooms were. A small balcony opened off her sitting-room. I could hear her talking to some one on this balcony. The person she was talking to, as I heard in another moment, was Jed. I was then almost under the balcony.

"I am a resolute man," Jed was saying. "I'll have my own way. I'll have what I want. I'll make you glad to come to terms. I'm a reasonable man too. Now, admit that I've been considerate."

I started to get out of hearing as quietly and rapidly as I could, but I heard Mrs. Sidney, her voice vibrant with indignation, say:

"I ought to have you whipped."

"That is silly, unreasonable passion," said Jed.

"I shall not hesitate to kill you," said Mrs. Sidney.

Then I went out of earshot. The fact that Jed could threaten Mrs. Sidney in this fashion was inexplicable. It could not be explained by his serviceability to Mr. Sidney, great as that was. I walked about for a while, distressed and depressed; then I patted the heads of the mastiffs, went indoors and to my room.

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An hour later I opened my door in response to a light rap. Mrs. Sidney was there.

"May I come in a moment?" she asked. "Thank you. I have a request to make which you cannot help but think is extraordinary—preposterous."

I placed a chair for her. She thanked me but remained standing. I thought she must be in an agony of mind, but she smiled.

"I hope it is to ask me to take Jed in hand," I said.

"No; it is to ask you to permit me to announce the engagement of my daughter Isobel to you. Don't be alarmed. It shall not make any difference in your life. It is a desperate expedient I am using out of a difficulty."

I felt as if I were in a spiritual fog.

"Is that the only way I can help you out?" I asked.

"The only one," she said. "I have thought of everything."

"Has it to do with Jed again?" I asked.

"With things I cannot possibly explain. Is there any one who would be distressed by such an announcement?"

"Not a soul," I said, "—except Miss Sidney."

"I would not cause pain," said Mrs. Sidney.

"Are you sure there is no one?"

"Mrs. Sidney," I said, "you are the only lady

who ever has given me a thought since I knew my mother. I am merely wondering what Miss Sidney will think of me in such a rôle. Will she understand why I take it? I am not hesitating. I hope I do not seem to be, but I know—I suspect—that your decision is sudden.”

“Isobel’s affection for us is greater than her demand for independence,” said Mrs. Sidney. “If she knows that I asked you to consent to this announcement, she will think of you as a proved friend.”

I had suggested all the precautions that were reasonable. “You certainly may make any use of me you want to,” I said. She thanked me and said good night.

CHAPTER VII

ISOBEL'S view of our engagement was purely comic. She may have had a second of spiritual revolt, but comedy and consideration for her mother asserted themselves. Mrs. Sidney, when she told Isobel of the engagement, had me present. The mother was really embarrassed, almost flustered, but she was determined. Isobel was greatly amused.

It may be imagined that I was not heroic. I might better have been a wax figure taken from a display-window; I felt like one, a thing with a wax smile and no animation. I shall never be Olympian, but I trust that never again shall I be so shrivelled and insignificant.

Isobel corrected herself in a moment. She was beautifully considerate of her mother.

"It is merely precautionary," said Mrs. Sidney uneasily. "It is quite impossible to explain. You will have to accept my judgment, Isobel. Dr. John,"—an odd halfway-house toward intimacy she reached and stopped at,—"*Dr. John* has been kind enough to do as I asked him. I need and want the support of my children in what I am doing."

I felt a touch of emotion at that. Unconsciously, intent upon her main point, she had included me at the fireside and had spoken of her "children."

"Anything you do or have done is all right, Mother," said Isobel, recovering from her sense of humour. "Dr.—John—will not be unhappy—I am sure—will you, Doctor? And I—Mother—I'll get an advantage of you in this—see if I don't."

"You mustn't try to, Isobel," said Mrs. Sidney anxiously. "I am doing the best I can."

Later in the evening I saw Isobel, finding her alone in the library, where she was reading. I went in to get a book before going to bed. She was by a lamp near the fireplace, and she looked very beautiful.

"I want to talk to you," she said when she saw me. "Do you know the explanation of this?"

"No," I said.

"You are not quite honest," she said. "If you do not know, you at least suspect."

"What do I suspect?" I asked.

"A man engaged to a girl he never asked to marry him might suspect that something was out of the ordinary," she suggested.

"Of course, something is extraordinary," I said.

"Do you know what it is?"

"No, I don't," she said. "Why don't you sit down?"

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With a soft witchery of femininity she pervaded and glorified the room, but she was peremptory. I was not sullen, but I felt defiant.

"Because I don't want to sit down," I said.

Isobel smiled indulgently at me.

"Oh, sit down, Dr. John," she said, "I want to talk to you. We are engaged, you know, and engaged people ought to have a talk after the event, if not before."

"You understand how this happened," I suggested.

"I do," she said. "My mother is frightened. Jed has been trying to marry me."

"What can give him the privilege of such insolence!" I exclaimed.

"I imagine he is enamoured," she said serenely. "It may seem impossible to you."

"You do yourself an injustice. You make light of a matter that is distracting to your mother."

"Not at all," said Isobel. "I am perfectly capable of getting along, but my mother does not know it. I am engaged to you. Is not that considerate of her?"

"Has this man approached you directly?" I asked.

"He has been gallant, amorous, suggestive, tender, soulful, aggressive, pleading, threatening, subservient and—I think that is all—but only in manner."

"I don't understand it," I said helplessly.

"Neither do I," she said. "And I know just enough to know that I shall not understand it. I do not like to find a *Romeo* among the servants, but I have learned to accept some strange conditions here—among them you."

"Don't disturb yourself about me," I said.

A good deal of my hurt pride must have found expression in that remark.

"I am unjust," she said. "I know that you are doing what my mother wants done and that you are not considering yourself. I shall be reasonable. I want to make my mother's life as pleasant as it can be made. I cannot understand everything that she needs of me, but I know that you have done everything that you could do for her. I do not want to seem inconsiderate."

"I want to do a great deal more than I seem to be able to do," I said. "The trouble is that I do not know how to do enough."

"Neither do I, Doctor," said Isobel, "and it would only make things worse if I tried to find out more."

"I'd like to protect you and your mother," I said.

"We are indebted," said Isobel, with a chill and unkind restraint. Then she smiled and said:

"Good night, Doctor. If I am inconsiderate at any time, put it down to a naturally bad temper."

CHAPTER VIII

JED had taken a small shotgun and had said that he was going after rabbits, which were unusually numerous and threatened to be damaging to the young brush about the place. It was an October afternoon with a warm sun. An hour or two after Jed had gone, I went out for a walk, going down by the pool.

Usually in a walk I went by the paths, and habit had more or less formalised my procedure. To avoid wasting a thought or making a choice, I went nearly every time by the same way to the same place and back again. Habit relieves one of decision in small matters and thus simplifies life. Occasionally, for some simple reason, one modifies habit, and as I walked along this time I did. I think it was some late golden-rod on a slope that took me off the path and into the thickets.

I was in the brush for fifteen minutes, and it happened that while I was there I saw from a little prominence the figure of Jed on ahead with his shotgun. He was some distance away, but I could see that he was going stealthily from tree to tree in an odd fashion for one hunting for rabbits. It

was as if he were stalking something rather than trying to kick rabbits up out of the brush.

I went on toward the pool, but not by the path, staying in the brush to look for fringed gentians. Once again I saw Jed ahead of me. I came out on the path and went on to the river-bank, where I sat down.

The pool's edge was studded with granite rocks worn smooth. Above the high-water mark, a variety of ferns grew. The current of the river, flowing by a point of sheer rock which protected the pool at the north, sent eddies whirling in toward the recessed bank. A piece of wood thrown in might drift into the sluggish water close to the bank, or it might go circling swiftly into the main current again.

Whenever I saw a piece of drift in the pool and watched its movements, I thought of the body of the slain brother. It had been whirled out into the current and had been carried downstream. On the bank had been found a few torn bits of clothing—the sleeve of a coat, a collar spotted with blood, a necktie and a piece of a white shirt. There also had been found a heavy walking-stick, bloodied and with hair in the blood.

The story of the pool was always most fascinating, with its suggested pictures, as one sat at the river's edge, watching the river life and action, the colours on the broad stream and in the hills beyond

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it. A mile below, a ferry breasted the current; sloops with brick came into the great bay from around the far point to the north; dirty fishing-boats went up and down; passenger steamers passed by. It was a rich, fascinating picture.

This day I had not been sitting on the bank five minutes when I was startled by a shot from the near-by thickets, and a bullet hit within two feet of where I was sitting, knocking off the bark of a tree. The report was not that of a small shotgun such as Jed had carried. It was the report of a rifle or pistol.

The chipped bark showed that a bullet, not shot, had hit the tree, and I was unpleasantly conscious of what had happened. Jed had shot at me, probably with a large-calibre revolver. He could not have had a rifle, unless he had one hidden in the brush. I had seen what he carried, not only as he left the house but as he was dodging through the thickets.

It likely was a pistol or a revolver, and that was why he had missed me. I was stupefied for an instant, and I did not jump or start. I was motionless, not even looking around, but I was thinking rapidly. A subconscious protective idea formed almost instantly, and when the next moment another shot came from behind me, I fell forward on my face, rolled a couple of feet to a

bush, turned my face in the direction from which the shot came, got out my pistol and lay still.

After a minute or two which seemed a very long time, Jed's face came in view in the brush. He looked malevolent but seemed undetermined and cautious. I think he was uncertain whether to leave my body where it lay and have it discovered, or throw it into the river and have my disappearance unexplained. His decision was given him by the noise of a farm-wagon approaching on the road, and he disappeared. I was ready to shoot him if he came near me.

I was young and had youth's confidence, but nevertheless this event would have sent me away from Hartley if it had not been for Isobel and Mrs. Sidney. They needed even my small help and I had to remain. I had to remain but I had also to protect myself. Another time Jed might not miss. On the way back to the house I thought out a plan which I believed would work. I inquired for Jed and was told that he was with Mr. Sidney. I found him there drinking, and my entrance gave him a shock which he plainly indicated. His fright made him so ugly that he was comic.

Mr. Sidney never liked to have his vicarious drinking interrupted, but he always was good-natured.

"Well, Doctor," he said, "what now? Is Jed drinking too much for my health?"

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At that moment no possible amount of liquor would have been too much for Jed. The wretch must have thought I was a ghost.

"Jed may drink himself to death, for all me," I said. "That probably is the best end he can come to. I think he is gallows-meat, but I want to talk to him when you can spare him."

"We can't spare Jed to have him hanged," said Mr. Sidney. "He's too useful. Who else could drink my wine of an evening? Go along with the Doctor, Jed, and see what he wants. It's probably a matter of pills or powders for me."

Jed was recovering from his shock, but he still showed the effects of it.

"No hurry," I said. "I'd rather wait a half-hour. I'll be in my room."

I went there and wrote two letters. Both were to one point. They related circumstantially what had happened that afternoon. One I addressed to a lawyer I knew, and the other to Dr. Brownell. Jed knocked at the door as I finished them. He was still unnerved.

"I have something I want you to read," I said, and gave him the letters. He read them and moistened his lips.

"You don't need to talk, Jed," I said. "I'll do all the talking that's necessary. I am not going away. I am going to stay right here, and you'd better be very careful of my health. These

letters go out to-night. The men who get them will keep their mouths shut so long as I am alive. If anything should happen to me, whether you had anything to do with it or not, you'd have a difficult time with a jury."

"It was a mistake," he said. "I would not do you any harm. I shot at a rabbit."

"Twice with a pistol when you had a shotgun," I said. "You did! I was the rabbit."

CHAPTER IX

JED came to me the next day in one of his candid moods.

"I did shoot at you yesterday," he said.

"I know you did," I replied.

"And you're wondering why and you're wondering if I intend to do it again."

"I don't wonder at anything you do," I said.

"And you know that if you do it again, the evidence is prepared against you. I think I am perfectly safe. I know you are a coward."

"No, I'm not a coward," he said, as if he were stating a fact and not making a boast. "I never do anything without a purpose, and when I have a purpose, I do it no matter what the consequences may be. The reason I wanted to shoot you was because you were engaged to Isobel. I intend to marry Isobel. Now I know that you are not going to marry Isobel. You are just the foolish fence that her mother thought she could build up around Isobel and keep me from trying to marry her. Isobel doesn't want you. She is laughing at you. So we might as well be friends again."

"You preposterous old fool!" I said. "You

senile alcoholic! You are a violation of decency. You enfeebled, exasperating old goat! You would sicken the moral conscience of a mummy. If you ever associate your aspirations with the name of Miss Sidney again, I'll cut your throat with a paper-knife."

Jed smiled and made me feel ridiculous.

"I am a more intelligent man than you," he said. "You are too simple for the complexities of life. You could not possibly be sufficient for a girl of Miss Sidney's character. She would die of boredom in six months. There is nothing preposterous about my candidacy for Miss Sidney. I am older than I'd like to be, but that is all."

"You are a hideous old fool," I said, "but I think I can handle you, and I give you warning."

"I am going to be quite friendly," said Jed.

"You flatter yourself," I said.

"Well, anyway," he said, "I'm friendly."

He proved to be so. The life of the house went placidly from day to day. Isobel, with a sense of our posturing toward each other, made mocking gestures of affection which shocked her mother. She particularly delighted to demonstrate, when Jed was serving dinner. I thought she would end by getting me shot in the back, but Jed had rated me finally as unimportant, which did my egotism no good. For such a rascal to discard me, formally betrothed as I was to Isobel, in his scanda-

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lous pursuit of that beautiful girl, was preposterous.

If I had showed that I was vexed, it would only have pleased him the more, and I refused to give him the satisfaction of causing me to lose my temper. Therefore, with his patronising wish to be friendly and my forced resolution not to be offended, we got along astonishingly well, considering the real animosity of our relations.

If Mrs. Sidney had known that I was idiotically in love with Isobel, she would not have sought relief from her distress by the arrangement which made me her daughter's protective fiancé. The only thing I could take credit for in this absurd situation was that Mrs. Sidney was not allowed to know the state of my feelings.

Although a fool, I had not presented myself as one. Evidently my romanticism gradually got itself incased in a most unprepossessing shell of a man and did not appear from behind this protection. I suppose I looked and acted like an emotionless mechanism, a thing which prescribed pills, could use a scalpel and tried ordinarily to be polite and agreeable but was interested only in carcasses and diseases.

I was as sensible as a corrupting romanticism would permit me to be. I knew that any affection I might place in this fashion was a real and serious emotional vice, which if not controlled might lead

to unhappiness. That consciousness had steadied me, but it had not delivered me.

If Mrs. Sidney had known the helpless man with whom she was dealing, her kindness would not have permitted her to ask him for help which had to be torment to him. She dealt with the exterior man. I kept the interior man undemonstrative. I never could blame myself for the affection I had for Isobel.

She walked brightly through the old house of tragedy—as surely it was, however hidden the tragedy. She was the glint of sunshine in the aisles of the dark woods, the odour of roses against the wall. She had the charm of the hollyhocks, the freshness of the hepatica in the spring, the beauty of the wild rose in June.

If I showed my feeling more than a liver sausage shows a soul, I hope I may be punished. What I thought of Isobel was my own affair, so long as I kept it strictly my own affair.

A young man's affections are as the tendrils of the bittersweet. They *will* get hold of something. It may be the young man's tragedy that they fasten on something worthy. It may be his tragedy that they fasten on something unworthy. It may be his tragedy that they reach out for something they cannot attain and, striving to the utmost, drop hopeless and dejected.

Young and romantic, I was old enough to be

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sensible. Old enough? What must be confessed by a physician who, with three years' experience of the physical human horrors of a city hospital, found that a physical sensation of numbness hit him if he saw a certain girl unexpectedly—who found that his professional seriousness was increasing because he needed it as shelter for his real self?

I took myself in hand with as much energy and promptness as I could, following the announcement of our engagement. I did not want to confess myself a fool. I did not intend to do so if I could help it.

I overdid it. I became disagreeable. I kept as much out of Isobel's presence as possible. I never willingly was alone with her. I did my best to avoid meeting her or speaking to her. I must have succeeded not only in making myself everything I did not feel, but also in making myself obnoxious. Isobel met the situation with her natural frankness after I had been giving this demonstration of myself for some time.

"Doctor," she said, "this household necessarily imposes friendships upon the people in it. I wonder if we could not be a little more agreeable to each other."

I did not know what to say. I hoped not to be a hypocrite, and I did not want to be absurd.

"I shall be glad to be as agreeable as I can,"

I said after some mental stuttering. "I want to be, but I am so awkward."

"I want to be too," said Isobel; "and if we both want to be, we shall not have to glower at each other every time we meet. Even mother does not require it and father would detest it."

Without saying anything more, she made me see that I had used a cheap device to escape the consequences of a foolish affection. The girl in a very friendly fashion had shown me that my avoidance of her was marked, cool and unreasonable. It was wholly reasonable from my poor standpoint, but from no other.

I saw that I was meeting my difficulty by running away from it, and I not only did not like the timidity of escape in this fashion, but furthermore, I did not like the opinion Isobel formed of me because of it. I had to face the music, and after that I did. It ought not to have astonished me that I felt better instantly. I knew that a coward only increased his troubles.

I imagine if I had not seemed such a professional stick, such a thing aloof from human emotions, Isobel would have been merely friendly and kind. As it was, she was tantalising. She liked me well enough, but that meant very little. If she did not drive, ride, walk or play tennis with me, she had a choice of the servants. It was I or nothing.

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I was with Mr. Sidney a number of hours every day. They varied, sometimes seven or eight a day in different periods, sometimes three or four. Very little of this time was occupied in professional duty. Life at Hartley House would have been intolerably lonesome if I had been there merely as a practitioner. And therefore I welcomed a routine that was outside my profession. Mr. Sidney had a delicacy of perception which told him when attention upon even so amiable an invalid might be drawing upon the physical reserve of the people waiting upon him or being with him. He always managed that they never should feel the fatigue of it.

We saw no company at Hartley House. We made no calls and received none. We extended no invitations and received none. The estate was baronial, and it had baronial habits, but it brought no friends to the doors. It was only occasionally that it seemed to me strange so attractive a household had an entirely intensive life. It was enough for itself. We were not near any family which would think it a social duty to make a formal play in the reception-room. Mr. and Mrs. Sidney were aliens and had no old intimates. Thus the household stood alone.

It was nearly always with regard to Isobel that the condition seemed unnatural. For an invalid like Mr. Sidney it was natural enough. Mrs. Sid-

ney was wholly devoted to him; I was engaged in professional duties; and for Jed and the servants in the house it was natural to be content with what they had of life or with the performance of duties for which they were paid and which they might abandon at will. But this was Isobel's life. She was young, vibrant, beautiful, but vistas opening into human prospects were closed to her. And she was engaged to a piece of professional dead wood who happened to be the only masculine thing available when her mother was in great distress.

I thought that this was the tragedy of age destroying youth, no matter how lovingly. If I had been a man capable of winning Isobel's affections, the romance of our lives might have had a perfect setting in this charming spot. But when I considered that this wonderful young girl found only me, aside from her parents, to give zest to life, I was indignant.

I suffered an ecstatic unhappiness from which I sought relief by severe mental discipline. Occasionally I seemed about to have success and to establish a mental control, but every time that defence broke down.

Later Isobel said that as a woman she knew of course that I loved her, but this is evident fiction. She did no such thing, and it would be an unkindness to her to think so. What was only

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comedy if I were, as she thought I was, an indifferent, unfeeling man, would have been cruelty if it had been known that the position was mockery of denied hopes.

Isobel used me to gain her liberty. She affected familiarities and called me "John" derisively, or worse "dear" or "old dear." I protested, in more pain than she could guess.

"We are engaged," she said. "What should I call you?"

"You might consider the fact that we are not engaged," I suggested.

"But we are. If we don't act as if we were, you'll not be any protection against Jed. Don't you want me to call you John?"

"Of course I do," I said. "It's perfectly straightforward, natural and proper."

"Then it's the 'dear' and 'old dear' you object to, and I perfectly delight in calling you 'old dear.' It fits so well—it is really wonderful. It is almost a complete description as well as a charming appellation. I adore it."

"I object to unnecessary freedom," I said.

"But it helps to deceive Jed."

"Nothing deceives Jed. He was deceived only for a short while. Then he tried to kill me. He apologised afterward for his mistake. He knows the character of our engagement."

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“ Just the same, he has not bothered mother since then as he did before.”

“ That is because he is a coward and I have him where I can control him.”

CHAPTER X

MRS. SIDNEY did not understand her daughter. That was not astonishing: Isobel was a young American woman; Mrs. Sidney had Spanish traditions. Isobel came naturally, through her father, to a candour which never ceased to amaze and—occasionally—to distress her mother. Isobel said what she thought. Her frankness came from honesty of character. Her lovely mother regarded life as something to be managed by reticence and denial. Mrs. Sidney was esthetic, and if a fact were unesthetic, she denied it and put it out of her consideration. It was, to her, the only proper thing to do.

To Isobel the proper thing to do was first to make sure that a fact was a fact, and if experience proved that it was, then to get it into its true relation with other facts and accept it.

Isobel was a clever tennis-player and I a poor one. She beat me three or four sets every fine afternoon. She liked to drive a car and ride a horse. I drove and rode with her.

When Isobel said for the first time that she wanted to take me for a drive in the car, her mother

made a little gesture of dismay. Isobel stood before her and smiled.

"You know we are engaged, Mother," she said.

I thought of the hen at the pond's edge seeing her brood of ducklings in the water. Mrs. Sidney was not in a panic and she did not flutter, but her distress was acute. She knew the girl had to develop, and she knew that she had to live in North, not South, America. But knowledge is not a complete anodyne to pain.

Isobel took her mother's hand and kissed it, and then her lips. She smiled in such an honest, frank, perceptive fashion—I know that a smile can contain all the human understanding in the world, because I saw Isobel's—and then, holding her mother's hand, she allowed Mrs. Sidney to have the moment of distress with the intimate support of her own presence.

It may seem a small struggle that mother and daughter went through, but it did not seem small to me who witnessed it, and it had no rhetorical and little emotional expression.

Isobel knew her mother suffered, but she was wise. Mrs. Sidney dreaded her daughter's adopted mode of life, but knew her daughter.

"Good-bye, Mother," said Isobel. "We sha'n't be gone long. Come on, John."

That was the first time she had called me John

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honestly and without comedy. I knew her finesse. She did it to give her mother the comfortable sense that she was not going upon a wild adventure of an automobile ride with an unrelated man but was within the strict intimacy of the family.

Yet to me the small favour of using my first name without derision was exhilarating. I felt as if the way to the door had become rosy but uncertain. I was a thing not as directly related to my body as was necessary for precise control of movement. A young fellow in love and hopelessly in love is a container of lunatic emotions.

We went driving, Isobel at the wheel. She liked to drive fast and I do not. I am timid. I do not think that locomotion is a genuine human pleasure. Possibly it is, behind either a fast or a plodding horse. I prefer the plodding horse. Locomotion then merely reveals gradually changing facets of the scene; one likes to see the manifold aspects of a landscape unfold. But an automobile driven as Isobel wanted to drive it revealed no facets. It merely blurred the vision and gave the idea that the satisfaction sought was a certain amount of wind blown in the face. For such as love it, not for me!

"That was a difficult scene, Doctor," she said.

I knew that was what she would call me next—"Doctor." I came directly down out of the clouds.

"I know it was," I said, "and I admired the honest way in which you managed it."

"I think I shall continue to call you John just that way," she said. "It seems more honest and decent. After all, we are engaged."

CHAPTER XI

SOMETIMES Mr. Sidney could be taken out in an automobile, of a warm, fair afternoon. It was not often that his strength permitted this, but whenever it did, I was glad not only to allow but to suggest that he make use of all opportunities. He had infinite resources of life in his own household and in his own character, but it was pleasant for him to escape the narrow confines of his world whenever it was possible.

He had a mood of serene contemplation on these rides. Life, ending for him, found earthly conditions still pleasant. I had seen him look at a field of wheat, yellow in the sunset, with a pleasure which plainly came from an acceptance of human terms and earthly provision. His west-window view of life was wholly placid.

The most beautiful of our river drives brought us, within the limitation of Mr. Sidney's strength, to the penitentiary at Alwick. It was a hideous structure of barracks, work-rooms and walls, of cells and armed guards; but it was in lovely surroundings, and if we took the best roads, we came naturally to the prison walls.

Mr. Sidney would look at the enclosure and the

guards in the turrets as if interpreting his own life in the terms of prison existence. We may have taken this drive by the prison road ten times when, approaching it on another of our outings, Mr. Sidney had the driver stop at the entrance.

"I feel very strong and well to-day, Doctor," he said, "and if you do not object, I think I should like to go inside. I have seen the outside so many times, I have a curiosity to see the inside."

In a way I could understand his feeling. For a number of years his life had been lived within walls. I thought he wanted to seek assurance of protection against self-pity by contrasting his pleasant condition of confinement with that of unfortunate men whose sins had put them in confinement without comfort.

I consented, thinking that with Jed and me helping him—we acted as his legs, guiding and sustaining his feeble motions—he was strong enough to make the effort. I did not know whether it was good or bad psychology to give him a sight of so many imprisoned men, but my instinct suggested that it would, in his case, be good. He was a logical, reasoning man—a rare phenomenon in the human race. If he had been emotional and sentimental, I should have had more doubt.

Mr. Sidney was important enough to be known in the neighbourhood. The warden of the prison came to meet him in the office as soon as we had

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entered. He was a kindly man, recognisable as such at first glance, I thought. He was not a sentimentalist, I judged. A sentimentalist in a prison can be a dreadful thing. He was merely a human being executing human laws upon the persons of human beings in the manner ordained out of the experience of folk in their endeavour at organisation, and doing it thoroughly, precisely and kindly. That is the impression I got of him.

He was very cordial to Mr. Sidney, who himself never showed more his aristocracy of democracy. I am a democrat. I am most fond of an aristocratic democrat. Such was Mr. Sidney.

Our charming old gentleman could not go through the entire institution, and the warden led him to the most accessible parts of the interesting place. We saw the rattan-chair works and the honour men in the gardens. We also took one glance at a tier of cell-houses and peeped into the dining-hall and into the chapel.

The warden would have had us stay to dinner.

"With your car here and the distance so short," he said in kindly hospitality, "I am sure Mr. Sidney could stand it, and not only would Mrs. Williams and I love to have you as our guests, but the convicts display themselves differently when their work is done. Mr. Sidney would be interested to study the character of the men as it is revealed then."

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I had to interpose and forbid this. It would have been too much of a physical strain upon Mr. Sidney. I knew that the little diversion was interesting him, and I was glad to have him interested, but I did not want to tax his physical strength.

"I'm the doctor's servant," he said. "I'll look into the library if you don't mind, Warden, and then we'll obey the physician."

Warden Williams led us to the library, which contained a large collection of books. An elderly convict was engaged in cataloguing some new volumes which had just been taken out of boxes. He was interested and paid no attention to us.

Mr. Sidney looked at him for a few minutes.

"What did you say was his crime?" he asked of the warden.

"That's Dobson," said Mr. Williams. "You must know his story. He is the man who killed his brother. You are living in the Dobson house."

I looked at the frail, white-haired man with a sudden shock of interest. This was the man who had created the ghost-story at Hartley House. He was fumbling registry cards and writing on them. He was frail and insignificant. He had been once, by legend, a sturdy, muscular, cruel brute. He was now feeble and interested in cataloguing.

Mr. Sidney looked about the room.

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"This does not seem to be so well protected as the other parts of the prison," he said.

"It is not thought necessary," said the warden. "Escape from here might not be impossible for an agile man. It is not impossible from any part of the prison. It can only be made improbable. It would be easier from here, but still difficult. But this old man would be in a harder prison of deprivation and friendlessness outside than he is inside."

"Do you mean that he is the man who made the ghost-story I bought with my house?" Mr. Sidney asked.

"That's all there is human of your ghost-story," said the warden.

"It is more than most ghost-stories have," said Mr. Sidney.

CHAPTER XII

I COULD not believe the slightest particle in the ghost-story. I am rationalistic. But as the legend of the pond took shape, my imagination began to give substance to its shadows.

I must be honest in confession and say that the accumulating effect of the story was to stimulate me to irrational emotions. There came times when a sougling of the wind in the gables and eaves of the house, the rasping of branches against the walls, the dead black of darkness in a room, the dead quiet of silence in a dark hall, gave me uncanny sensations. Yet the place was genial and cordial.

Mr. Sidney's joviality was the dominant note in the house. An aging sick man might naturally have been testy. He might have been impatient, have had whims and crotchets. He might have been irascible in his demands upon and acceptance of service. But Mr. Sidney was always cordial and considerate. A great deal of the time he spent in bed. When he was not in bed, he sat in a great chair, and very often a yellow Persian cat rested on his knees. It was a difficult if not dangerous

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matter for any one else than Mr. Sidney to touch the cat, named Algol.

"The Winking Demon," said Mr. Sidney, fingering the cat's ruff as it lay on his lap, and purred. I knew just enough of the star Algol and its variability to understand the whimsicality of an old man's naming a cat for the winking sun. Algol in Mr. Sidney's lap blinked at me, and the old man's genius for understanding and classification seemed uncanny.

Mr. Sidney's room was of great size. It had two fireplaces and a large cove of windows bulging toward the west. At the smaller of the two fireplaces he had his breakfast. Either at the large fireplace or in the outward bulge of windows, he had his dinner.

In spite of the Persian cat, Mr. Sidney had three canaries in the room. Algol respected them after a fashion that I thought uncertain. I have seen a canary sitting on the cat's head, but I thought it was a decided case of misplaced confidence. Algol wanted that canary and would continue to want it. He was deterred from natural action in the matter by his affection for the strange but kindly master who wanted cats and canaries to live together in amity.

I had enough sense to recognise in Mr. Sidney a very delicate voluptuary. Cats, canaries, log fires, sunsets and such things increased the sum of his

limited life. He made provision for certain animal sensations. He was determined that life should be enjoyable, no matter what the difficulties were. To see him with his great cat in his lap purring, and his three canaries hopping about his head and his chair, was to see a happy man. He was nearly dead but nevertheless wholly alive. He had preserved such sensations as could be preserved.

I know I never fully grasped Mr. Sidney's scheme of life, but I thought that he found existence ironic. His graciousness and his cheerfulness, I thought, represented the garlands of his conquest of morbidity. His personal charm was extraordinary. Every one in the house felt it. But an astonishing thing about Mr. Sidney was an occasional emotion which, as it manifested itself in his expressions—and that was the only fashion I saw it for a long time—was one of savage hate.

It was only by coming on him when he was not expecting me that I saw this. I remember that the first time I saw the expression on his face I was dumfounded. That I was not expected in his room was entirely without intention on my part. People who were accustomed to being with him walked into the room without ceremony. His bedroom and bath were to one side. His living-room he insisted should be open without formality.

On the occasion of which I speak I had come in

quietly, but it was without intention to surprise my patient. He was sitting in his large chair with Algol on his knees. His eyes were closed, and on his face was an expression of malevolence that was almost demoniac. It was so startling that the sight of it stopped me in my step and made me feel more than uneasy, almost afraid. Mr. Sidney was quiet, except that with one hand he stroked Algol about the head and ears. The caress was almost imperceptible in motion, but Algol was purring so loudly that the sound filled the otherwise quiet room.

The malevolence—the malignancy, hatred, concentrated essence of ferocity—in Mr. Sidney's face would have stopped any one. To one who had affection for him as I had, it was abhorrent to see him so. It was a confession of something I did not want to know.

I was in fear that he might hear me and opening his eyes, find that I had discovered him. I was embarrassed and uncertain what to do. It was a silly predicament, as I saw afterward. My part was quite simple. I should have paid no attention to any such phenomenon as the expression on a man's face and have acted perfectly naturally.

The common-sense thing—and I consider myself fairly sensible—was apparent afterward. It indicates the astonishing shock of the thing that I was unable to act sensibly. What was the expression

in an amiable, charming man's face, to knock a sensible person out of all his senses? Here was a dozing man merely toying with a cat's ears, and the very sight of what was expressed in his face, made me numb.

I cannot understand it now, the terrifying sensation being one which disappeared as the recollection of the emotions faded. What I did was to back toward the door, open it as quietly as I could, back out, and then re-enter the room noisily.

Mr. Sidney was looking at me smilingly. His charm of manner never seemed more positive and active.

"Hello, Doctor!" he said. "I needed company and just your company. If you would only drink wine!"

CHAPTER XIII

A BROKEN pipe in the laundry made it necessary to call a plumber from Hartley, and to get quick service, it was agreed that we should send a car for the man and his helper.

The day was pleasant, and for the sake of the drive I went with the driver. The plumber was a fat man of the comic type. I thought he must be the embodiment of all the plumbers' jokes. They seemed to have created him; he was the product of the comics.

I even asked him if he were sure he had all his tools. I thought he would be sure to send us back for a wrench. He was amiable, laughed at anything or nothing and was saved from being a nuisance only by an abounding animal optimism which was infectious.

He was garrulous and talked of every minutia of his daily experience, of his likes and dislikes, of how radishes disagreed with him, of how he could nourish himself on salt pork and cabbage. We heard for a half-mile that he would never wear overshoes or carry an umbrella, and that his wife certainly remonstrated with him. For another

half-mile we got his idea of suitable underclothing for winter.

He was an interesting egotism, an indomitable human being, heroic in his insignificance of thought and experience, and with that insignificance unrevealed to him. Of such are the kingdom of earth.

Driving through the Hartley House grounds, we came to the pool, and the plumber—named Harkins—chuckled. Thus far, whenever he or something else amused him, he had laughed. Now he chuckled as if in recollection of an experience richer or deeper than any he had been talking of.

“That place is going to be remembered by me,” he said. “I have been out here only once since the night I made a bet I was not afraid to sit on the bank here for an hour. They’ve got a good many stories of this place in town. I had been drinking a little. I don’t do it steady, but once in a while I get out. You’ve got to do it to keep the house going happy. Give the wife something to talk about. My wife would rather scold me than eat, and she loves her food.

“We were at the White Pigeon, having a good time but thinking of going home, when some one started on this Hartley House story. Everybody had something to say, and I said that there was no ghost that could scare me, at least no ghost that ever was within a hundred miles of Hartley.

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That's where I made a fool of myself. I've got to admit that's where I made a fool of myself.

"I bet five dollars I would sit an hour on the bank at this place. I forgot all about the dogs, or I'd not have made the bet. Anyway, they didn't bother me. We got an automobile and drove out here. The fellows left me at the pool and went a mile back. They were going to take my word for it. I was to stay an hour and then start walking back. At the end of an hour they would start toward me and pick me up. They had beer and sandwiches. I had a couple of bottles and some cheese and crackers.

"I sat down by the bank and opened a bottle of beer. Somehow or other the fact that I was showing I didn't care about ghosts began to make ghosts real things. I'd never given them any thought. Now I began to think about them. I guess I began to make them.

"I wasn't afraid of that place. I'm not afraid of any place unless I get to thinking about it, but I got to thinking about this one. It was along in October. A hoot-owl was somewhere back of me, and there was a whippoorwill up toward the house.

"I'm used to hoot-owls and whippoorwills, but I hadn't drunk more than half a bottle of beer before even these things began to sound different.

"The current of the river kept knocking at the big rock at the up end of the pool, and you began

to think that things were reaching for you out of the dark. I'd have given ten dollars to quit, but I got so that I didn't want to move. I felt safer sitting still.

"Then I began to hear things that I don't suppose were making a noise at all. It may be it was rabbits in the bush. I nearly died when I heard a cry about fifty feet back of me. I did hear that. I guess a ferret had got a rabbit. You know how a rabbit cries—like a baby.

"I was sitting in the open, and I thought I'd feel better if I got my back up against something. So I crawled over to some bushes and sat down behind them.

"Maybe I had been there a half an hour, feeling scary and uncomfortable, when I heard a regular yell. There wasn't any fooling about that. It sounded like some one being hurt but yelling not so much because of the hurt as because he was mad.

"You've heard fellows talking about their hair standing on end. I never knew what it really meant before, but my hair just stood right up. I felt like some one was trying to scalp me, and I was gooseflesh all over.

"It had been dark on account of clouds, but just then the moon came out and lighted up the place. There was a man standing on the edge of the pool, just about where I had been sitting. He was lean-

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ing with both hands on a cane and standing perfectly still. He didn't seem like a man. He looked like one, but you had a feeling that he wasn't one.

"I don't want ever to be so scared again. I didn't know who had yelled, but I thought this man had, and I didn't think he was a man. I thought he was a ghost. I'm not saying what I think now, but if I had to, I'd say that I saw the ghost of this place—and anybody that wants to laugh can laugh. He can come down here at night and get cured of laughing.

"I couldn't move for a while. The man stood still, leaning on his cane. I watched him until I began to feel that I could use my legs again. I don't know why I was so scared, but I was. I crawled away through the brush for a hundred feet or so. Then I got up and ran.

"I heard that yell behind me again. I'll bet nobody around here ever ran a mile as fast as I did. I scared the fellows who were waiting for me. They didn't poke any fun at me. They looked at me and got that automobile started. We even left the beer behind. I paid the bet, but they didn't have any laugh on me. There isn't one of them would come down here at night now."

"When was this?" I asked.

"Four or five years ago," said the plumber. "Some time in October."

We came to the house, and he went into the laundry to fix the pipes.

"It doesn't look haunted around here," he said as he perceived the tangible joviality of the place, "but you've got to get me out before dark."

That was virtually the complete substance of the Hartley House ghost—the picture of a man leaning on a cane by the edge of the river. Romance had to be content with it.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE evening in late October which had turned chill and brought up a high wind, Mr. Sidney produced a new phenomenon. He had a strange flash of strength. When I went to his room after dinner I found him walking about without help. Ordinarily, if he walked at all, Jed was his strength.

"Occasionally I can do it, Doctor," he said. "The strength comes. I usually pay for it next day, however."

"I'd be very careful, then," I suggested.

"Yes, but you do not know how grateful it is to feel vigour once in a while," he said, continuing to walk forth and back in the room.

I sat down and watched him without remonstrating. It was astonishing to see him so agile and strong but I had learned that timid prudence was very ineffective. I had confessed my inability to understand him.

He did not seem to want to continue life for the purpose of preserving its sensations but for the purpose of some accomplishment. His conditions were so pleasant that it might be reasonable to desire a prolonging of them. Evidently he was not

set upon that. He was not trying to accomplish anything. He did nothing. He had no unfinished work. And yet his will to live, I knew, was a will to see the fruit of something. He seemed to have a spiritual incentive; something that had other than a physical impulse controlled him and gave him resolution.

I was marveling at his strange activity when Isobel and Mrs. Sidney came in. Mr. Sidney proposed whist, and we began a game. The wind increased in violence, and the log fire grew in comfort. We had a pleasant game, disturbed for me only by speculations as to the cause of Mr. Sidney's strange animation and strength.

Shortly after ten o'clock the ladies said good night, and Jed came in with a fresh log for the fire. The wind had been increasing in volume, sound and power. I was thinking of bed.

"Sit a while longer, Doctor," Mr. Sidney urged. "Jed and I shall be the better for some other company. This is the sort of night we like to sit up to enjoy. Esthetically one ought to make the most of such a night."

Jed went out and presently came in again with two bottles of wine.

"What are we drinking to-night, Jed?" Mr. Sidney asked.

"I thought the evening suggested a warm sherry," said Jed.

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"I think it does," said Mr. Sidney. "There is body and a live soul in sherry."

"But certainly," I suggested in alarm, "you will not drink sherry."

"Indeed not," said Mr. Sidney. "Jed drinks it for me, and I watch him. You must have a glass with him—just one. He'll have a dozen—I don't ask you to follow him—but just one."

Jed opened a bottle, and when he offered me a glass I yielded. I wanted to increase the sense of protective comforts against that shrill wind outside.

Jed drew a comfortable chair close to the fire and took his wine in large but appreciative gulps. I took mine in small but appreciative sips. The fire roared, and the wind howled.

Jed, drinking by gulps, soon was exhilarated. Mr. Sidney and I had been rational. We had been talking, I recall, of the substitution of a Syrian idea of immortality, concerned chiefly with precious metals and stones, for the north European idea of Valhalla, when Jed began to sing, and with gusto and affection opened another bottle of wine. The wind grew in violence.

"It is a night for any of the living dead about a place," I said.

"I like a wind that has many voices," said Mr. Sidney. "It produces certain sensations or emo-

tions that are primitive. It suggests a threat and increases the sense of shelter and comfort. We sit like peasants about the fireplace and are inclined to legends."

"And tell sad stories of the deaths of kings," said Jed, drawing his chair nearer to the fire and spreading out his hands before it. He was drinking more rationally now, sipping his wine instead of gulping it. He had arrived at his desired state and wished to maintain it.

Mr. Sidney seemed to feel a comfortable glow as Jed drank. There was no doubt that by suggestion he obtained physical sensations of stimulation and joviality.

"If we had a ghost," said Mr. Sidney, "it would walk on such a night."

The wind made an extraordinary attack upon the windows as he spoke and sucked a soughing sound from the chimney.

"Tell the Doctor the story of the pool," Mr. Sidney said to Jed. "We are in the comfortable werewolf state. Let's have our legend. Do you want to add a shiver to your contentment, Doctor?" he asked.

"I want to hear the story," I said.

"So do I, once again," said Mr. Sidney, "—on such a night."

"This place once belonged to a family named Dobson," said Jed.

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"It was a very old family—for American families," said Mr. Sidney.

"Came over in 1640," said Jed.

"English Puritans from Holland," said Mr. Sidney. "Go ahead, Jed. I sha'n't interrupt."

"After the capture of New Amsterdam from the Dutch by the English, the Dobsons came down from the north and bought this manor-house from the Dutch family that had it. Then the Dobsons lived here in a simple fashion."

"Jed has a particular fashion of telling a story," said Mr. Sidney.

"I have a good deal of difficulty and embarrassment in telling one," said Jed.

"Never mind," said Mr. Sidney. "I have to help out occasionally when you neglect to high-light your points."

"They renamed it Hartley House for their father, who was Hartley Dobson. That's its name now."

"I don't want to break in unnecessarily," I said, "but where do you get your information, Jed?"

"It's all in records in the library," he answered, "and if I am going to tell the story, I want a fair chance. . . . A lot of generations of Dobsons lived here. There was always a Dobson family in the house, and the property came down to the generation that made this story. There were two boys in that family,—a half century ago,—the sons of James and Henrietta Dobson."

"Henrietta Dobson died when her son Richard was nine years old and her other son Henry was seven years old. James Dobson died two years later, and the boys were parentless. This family was an argument against families."

"That's one of the heterodox notions I have instilled in an innocent mind," said Mr. Sidney. "Jed, you must not repeat phrases in your narratives. You parrot things and try to pass them as observations."

"You'll have him surly in a moment," I suggested, "and then where is the story?"

"I never knew him surly," said Mr. Sidney, "and he could not be in his genial wine."

Jed showed the flicker of a malignant glance in my direction and went on with his story evenly and good-naturedly.

"I don't pretend to have all the details or to understand it," he said; "but from what I learn, Richard Dobson, the elder brother, was strong and brutal. Henry Dobson, the younger brother, was frail and sensitive. I guess they hated each other from the cradle."

"Dick, when he was four and Henry was two, found ways of tormenting his younger brother. The best thing Henry ever had from Richard was contempt."

"I have known families of that nature," said Mr. Sidney. "Our conventions teach us to regard a

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family tie as a sacrament. In many cases it is only an odious obligation leading to tragedy."

"Dick knew all of Henry's weaknesses," Jed continued. "Sometimes he would torture him physically, by twisting his wrist or rolling him over on the ground when young girls were around. Sometimes he would torture him without laying hands on him.

"Dick was a thick-headed brute, but he had a genius for cruelty. When their parents died and the boys approached their majority, Henry was almost an imbecile for fear of Dick.

"Dick wanted then to get his inheritance and go out into the world, but the estate was left in trust until both boys were of age. Dick came of age and was obliged to wait two years for Henry."

I was astonished by the succinct and philosophical brevity of this ignorant man's narrative. Mr. Sidney was at ease in his chair with his eyes closed and a placid expression of pleasure on his face. Jed was active in gesticulation as he talked. That was the effect of the wine. The wind continued to pull at the chimney and scold in the corners.

"Jed has read a great deal to me," said Mr. Sidney without opening his eyes. "I think he has become theatric."

"Well," said Jed, "to shorten a story, when Dick, being twenty-one, found that he had to wait

two more years for Henry, he became more brutal than ever. In some way or other, the night of the murder the two brothers happened to meet in a tavern in a village not far from Hartley House. Henry did not want to go home with his brother, but they both got drunk and they started to walk home together.

"No one has been able to do much more than guess at what took place, but it was known that Richard was a brute and that Henry was scared of him but was not a coward. They must have had a violent quarrel.

"There was a cottage near the pool. The only person in it at the time of the murder was a little girl, whose parents were not at home. She was awakened by cries and swearing. She said that she heard one man say: 'They'll find you dead in the morning.' Then she heard sounds of a struggle and was scared and hid her head under the bed-clothes.

"When her parents came home, she told them what she had heard, and they went out with a lantern to the place from which the noise came. They found parts of Henry's clothing. The next day Richard was found, ten miles away, still drunk. He confessed that he had killed his brother in a drunken rage.

"Afterward he said that he hadn't, but he admitted that there had been a quarrel. It was a

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most celebrated trial. Richard was convicted, though the State could not produce any indubitable physical evidence of Henry's death. The contention over this evidence made the case noted.

"Richard Dobson is in the penitentiary at Alwick now. Henry's ghost is what is supposed to come back to the pool."

The wind howled outside, and the fire burned cheerfully. As a romanticist I felt rebellious. The ghost-story lacked antiquity. A good ghost-story would not have any human element in it a prisoner in a near-by penitentiary. It was too common a savour of the present.

"But Stevenson would have liked the story," said Mr. Sidney. "It has so much hate in it. Probably it is because I live here where this tale of hate has its scene that I enjoy 'The Master of Ballantrae' so much."

CHAPTER XV

WHEN I said good night to Mr. Sidney and Jed, I did not go to my room. A little alcoholic stimulant to one unaccustomed to it will break down routine. Jed drank a great deal and kept to his habits steadily because they were based upon an accustomed ration of alcohol. Extraordinary habits were his normal.

I went to the library to select a book and take it to my room. The fire in the library was burning cheerfully. The wind had a clear sweep at the windows. To a slightly exhilarated perception, the circumstances were alluringly comfortable.

I found a good book but lost the inclination to go to my room. I sat down in a comfortable chair, having turned off all the lights except that of the reading lamp. The library was large, and when the reading lamp alone was lighted, there were deep shadows and the room was largely in darkness.

I read for a while and then fell asleep. I had no intention of doing that, but drowsiness came irresistibly and I was gone before I could force myself to go to bed.

It was two o'clock when I awoke. The wind had

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died down. I felt restless and uneasy, not being accustomed to falling asleep in this fashion. The sensation of waking up and having perceptions struggle to establish not only location but identity was unpleasant.

I started then for bed but stopped at the main door of the house on my way. I went to look to the fastenings and found that Jed, whose duty it was to close the house, had forgotten to lock and bar the door.

It was this incident of seeing the chain hanging down and of going to the door that suggested a cure for my unpleasant restlessness after the nap in the library. I opened the door and went outside for a walk.

The moon in its last quarter was rising in a cloud-filled sky. There was light one instant and then dark. I expected the dogs to join me, but none came.

A challenge arose within me—to go down by the way toward the haunted pool. It was the moral taunt of a suggested cowardice. I thought of the place and of all I had been told of it; and the instinctive apprehension, perceptible as I stood on the steps to the entrance, provoked the challenge.

It seemed imperative. It would have been a moral retreat to go back into the house, as would have been sensible, lock the door and go to bed. That seemed like backing down in the face of an

inviting danger. These challenges are inconsequential, but they seem important to character.

I did not have the real moral courage, which was to turn my back on the invitation and go indoors. I went down the steps to prove to myself my confidence in myself—thereby disproving it.

When such an idea has worked its way into the mind, it produces a distortion of perception. The landscape was in changing light and shadow, as the moon rode into and out of clouds. Familiar objects got new significance. Inconsequential noises took on purpose. As I walked along the accustomed way, I felt uncertainty as to what possibly might be behind me. This, I thought, was a symptom of moral collapse. It then became still more important to march myself down to the pool and thus dispel spiritual vapours and to re-establish common sense.

As I neared the pool, the moon went behind a cloud. I came to a clump of bushes. The moon came from behind its cover. There was a gentle flood of returning light. I was in, or rather behind, a screen of trees and brush. The pool was fifty feet away.

At the edge of the pool a man was revealed in the moonlight. He leaned on a stick.

The moon went behind another cloud, and the figure on the bank became indistinct. It almost disappeared. I stood still, with apprehensive

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shudders working up and down my spine. The phenomenon was outrageous and unbelievable. The moonlight flashed out again for an instant. I saw the figure again but persuaded or tried to persuade myself that I did not see it, to say to myself that it was a bush twisted into extravagant shape by my imagination.

The moon went under a great dark cloud. I made a moral and physical retreat. I did not run. That would have been an honest confession and expression of desire. I was hypocritical and walked, but my moral defeat was complete.

There was a man at the haunted pool.

I had seen him and something had deterred me from speaking to him, finding out who he was or why he was there.

CHAPTER XVI

A REALLY violent change came into our lives. A suggestion that Mr. Sidney go to the South for the winter was acted upon, and within a month I was separated from the place and people so important in my affections. Dr. Brownell had been called to Hartley House by Mr. Sidney's discouraging condition. Our invalid had overtaxed himself the evening he displayed such activity in his room, such unusual strength and agility. The following morning he was almost in collapse. I was alarmed and telephoned Dr. Brownell, who came out at once.

"You will see his will pull him through," he said. "If it were not for that, I should be alarmed. He is very low."

"I blame myself for permitting the unusual exertion," I said. "My judgment was deluded, I think, by my happiness at seeing him so strong. He really seemed strong. It did not seem fictitious or unnatural."

Dr. Brownell said that the phenomenon was not new in his experience with Mr. Sidney's case.

"I have had it six years," he said, "and this is the sixth time he has gone from unexplained and

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unnatural strength to extreme and dangerous weakness. And always in the fall—somewhere about this time. Each time I have seen his will assert itself and strengthen him in his exhaustion.”

I felt that I had been careless and was responsible, but Dr. Brownell did not say so or, apparently, think so. He came every day for a week, and Mr. Sidney slowly regained his strength. Only one reference was made to the night I walked to the pool and saw the figure at the river’s edge.

The day I called Dr. Brownell I had been too concerned and alarmed to pay much attention to any one but Mr. Sidney and did not observe until toward evening that Jed was malignantly unfriendly again in his attitude toward me. Finally he made it apparent by a bit of vicious insolence. I had determined never again to take hold of that nettle gingerly but to clutch it.

“What do you mean by that?” I asked.

“There is a plague of officiousness about here, or has been since you came,” he said. “You locked the front door last night some time, didn’t you?”

“I found it open this morning, and after I had walked about the grounds for a while I came in and threw the bolt,” I told him.

He seemed unpleasantly astonished—jolted and disturbed.

“You were abroad last night!” he exclaimed.

“You had locked me in, I know,” I said, “—or

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thought you had. I found my door bolted when I went back to my room. I wasn't in it when you bolted it," I added. "I was asleep in the library. When I awakened I went outside for a moment. The door was unfastened. I bolted it when I came in."

Jed was more disturbed, and he showed it.

"Where did you go?" he asked.

"I walked around," I said, "down by the river."

His discomposure became acute. He looked sick.

"Where were the dogs?" I asked. "I didn't see any."

He tried to smile.

"They were with me," he said. "I was out, and you locked me out. That's why I have been so indignant. I came back and found I had to break into the house. I was in a hurry. You wouldn't have liked it yourself."

"I don't like it myself. I don't like being locked in my room. I'll not have it. I thought I had given you to understand that it would not be tolerated. I do not want to annoy the family by complaints, but I will not endure that."

"Well, you can see the occasion for it. You were loose last night, and your conscientious officiousness made trouble. I knew your type, the moment I set eyes on you. I said here's a trouble-making person with a duty. You show it. Of course, you had to bolt that door. You could not

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assume that it was open for a purpose. No thought of anybody that might be outside! I knew you. That's why we're safe only when you are locked in your room."

"Well, I'll not have it," I insisted, "and you can understand that. It is flat. Why do you have to run around the grounds at night?"

"Do you have to be judge of my habits? If you do, it may satisfy you to know that I frequently have many duties to perform for Mr. Sidney in the night. I frequently drink too much wine. I frequently walk around the grounds to clear my head and be able to do what is needed by Mr. Sidney. You are a fine doctor! Didn't you see Mr. Sidney was overexerting himself last night? Didn't you know he'd pay for it? I did, but I couldn't stop it. Who do you suppose was with Mr. Sidney all night? I was. Your service was that of locking me out. You ought to be manacled instead of merely locked in. You're superserviceable. It's a crime. Get over it."

My mind had jumped to a conclusion.

"Were you at the pool last night?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

He was very ugly.

"You seem to be a Paul Pry," he said. "You ought to be manacled."

I was not interested in Jed. I was thinking of my figure at the pool. As embodied in Jed it did not fascinate me.



CHAPTER XVII

DR. BROWNELL suggested the winter trip to the South. Mr. Sidney's vitality needed careful nursing. It was important to protect him from winter rigours, even as they could be modified in a sick-room. The doctor said he himself felt the need of a change. He prescribed one for both his patient and himself. He and Mr. Sidney made the arrangements. Mrs. Sidney and Isobel were to go.

A steam yacht was to be leased and brought up the river to the house landing. Mr. Sidney's trip would involve no more exposure than that of being wheeled or carried the short distance from the house to the landing.

Arrangements went ahead rapidly, and a sense of desolation increased within me. Romantic folly came to its accounting. The fairy story was to be ended without youth's necessary "They lived happily ever after."

The yacht came up to its mooring and lay by the landing for a week while the provisioning was being cared for. Hundreds of bottles of Mr. Sidney's fine wines were put on board—for the unspeakable Jed. I could imagine the delicate voluptuousness of Mr. Sidney in a warm night in

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Southern waters with the great Canopus in the sky and Jed halfway through his second bottle.

Isobel was eagerly anticipatory. Mrs. Sidney, I thought, seemed merely to be resigned, with trepidation. My prospects were wholly disconsolate. But they improved.

First there was a cordial statement by Mr. Sidney.

"Doctor," he said, "when we come back, we shall wish we had not gone unless we can find you again with us. In fact, I do not believe I'd submit to these arrangements with any other understanding. My friend Brownell tells me he cannot go unless you relieve him of his practice. That is the only consideration upon which I consent at all to leaving you behind. Brownell has to get away. He is getting old, you know."

Mr. Sidney's smile made his pity of Dr. Brownell a kindly irony but I thought he actually felt more assured in expectancy than the famous doctor.

Dr. Brownell was even apologetic. He said he was depriving me of an interesting voyage. If he did not go, I should have been needed, but he thought it important for his efficiency that he conserve his strength over the winter, and he asked me to act as one of his assistants.

That was flattery. It was intended to be so. Both Mr. Sidney and Dr. Brownell were delicately considerate of emotions.

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Mrs. Sidney was the one who offered me the real balm.

"John," she said, "we shall want you with us. We shall miss you."

"Don't you think, Mrs. Sidney," I suggested, "that now we can consider this fiction terminated?"

"You mean your engagement to Isobel?"

"Surely."

"No, please," she said. "On the boat there will be no problems. The community is too compact and must be considerate. But when we come back, I'll need you just as before."

Isobel said:

"Good-bye, John. Be at the landing when we return. You'll be the first person I want to see."

I ought not to have been so disconsolate. These were fair portents, but a portent does little to console a loss. I stood on the little dock and watched the yacht go down the river. And when it had disappeared below the point of land south of the pool, all the world was sad and life had no prospects to give it value.

Charles drove me to the city. I was a bit of human driftwood for a week. It did not matter that they were coming back. They were gone; that was the disaster. It was in the present; the future is too ambiguous for consolation or comfort.

I, disconsolate, miserable, moody and spiritually unwell, could see only this tragedy: they were gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

I WENT through a winter of ecstatic distress, trying to be efficient in my discharge of professional duties for Dr. Brownell and to be professionally composed in aspect and mind. I had an anguished delight in my experiences. My loneliness was my most acute pain and my most cherished comfort. I did not want to profane the emotional solemnity of so much unhappiness by subjecting it frequently to the banal touch of sociable life in the ordinary. It was a joy to be profoundly unhappy.

I dined, whenever possible, in a little French restaurant, not overnice, but beloved by me because Madame, the wife of the proprietor, was so serenely, purely and comfortably feminine in the cashier's cage where she knitted when she was not taking in money and making change. The individual woman I wanted being not only out of sight, but to normal prospect out of expectation, I wanted association with abstract womanhood. Whenever I could, I went to the theatre in the afternoon, because the audiences were composed so largely of sleek women with violets and orchids.

I had letters from the enchanted party in the South. Mrs. Sidney wrote twice a week with great affection. Mr. Sidney once a week dictated to Jed a letter, cordial and jocular, for me. Occasionally Jed added a sheet for himself, kindly or rasping as the mood had him at the time.

Isobel also wrote, but with the greatest eccentricity. While they were at Palm Beach I had a letter a day from her for four days. Then I had none for two weeks, although they remained at Palm Beach. She made the postman a tragedian for me.

In one letter this virginal imp wrote as if I were her lover, and that letter was as the song of the meadow lark from a snow-covered field in March, as the odour of lilacs on a warm night in May.

The Sidneys went to the Bahamas but did not remain there. They wrote me that Mr. Sidney was well. Dr. Brownell was convinced that all were the better, himself included, for their experiment and that Mr. Sidney's condition would permit a longer voyage in his pleasant circumstances. Consequently they were going on to South America. Mr. Sidney wanted to revisit Montevideo.

Thereafter Mrs. Sidney wrote with such regularity as circumstances and mail-boats would permit, and Isobel as her caprice governed her. From Montevideo I had a letter from Jed in a different

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tone from his sarcastic banter and taunting. I thought it was the letter of a man who had suffered a shock. I could not say why I thought so, but I thought something had disturbed him. His letter in the main was a short record of trivial incident, interesting because I loved the people involved, but it had an overtone. It was an overtone of friendship. I gathered the idea that something had changed Jed's view of life.

Early in March came letters saying that my folks shortly would be on their way home, to arrive after our uncertain spring had resolved itself securely into weather safe for a feeble man who had accustomed himself to luxurious temperatures. I then felt invigorated, as by a promise in March of hepatica. My winter was breaking up.

At a *matinée*—I continuing to go to inhale the fragrance of sleek women with violets and orchids—I met an old-time acquaintance, a dentist who had been several years in South America. His name was Alcott, Henry Alcott.

Alcott and I never had been intimate or affectionate, but we greeted each other with ardour. I was lonesome. Alcott may have been. There is a lonesomeness associated with a return to a place which has forgotten you and receives you as an alien.

We had dinner together and enjoyed our meet-

ing. There was furtively, at dinner, a reminiscent amateness in his conversation. It suggested that he was smirking over exploits which he might relate if his restraints were broken down. I recalled with distaste that a bold and unesthetic sensuality, a frank and disillusioned animalism, had made him, in other times, disconcerting.

He had a talent for merely carnal stories. They gained additional carnality in his telling of them. He drank a good deal at dinner and wanted to go to the theatre. After the theatre we went to supper and, with more drink, he began actually to express himself.

I must have been given the record of half the amatory experiences of South America for two years. Alcott told them with gusto. The one that fascinated me he did not emphasise more than the others. As he told these stories he was trying to convey the charm of sex-adventure in Latin America. I think he wanted, by other instances, to suggest his own adventures.

A man named Sinclair—that was as Alcott remembered the name, but it might, he said, have been *St. John* or *Southgrove* or *Sergeant* or anything else beginning with S; it was long before Alcott's time in South America, and he merely told the story because it was a standardised episode—this man Sinclair, an Englishman or a man from the States, a fairly young man, anyway, and at-

tractive, had fallen in love with a most charming young woman of excellent family.

Alcott could not remember whether this little episode had been staged in Rio or Valparaiso or Buenos Aires or where. His uncertainty suggested the important scope that his own experiences embraced.

"It might have been in Montevideo," he said. He did not emphasise the remark, but the remark subsequently emphasised the story for me.

Sinclair—Alcott thought we might as well agree upon *Sinclair* as a name—had come out of somewhere or nowhere and had made a great deal of money. When he fell in love, he was an advantageous match. The parents accepted him gladly.

Sinclair and the young lady were married, but he did not have the Latin genius for isolating and guarding a woman. Neither did he have the genius for completely interesting and absorbing a woman. He was in the shipping business. He was a very practical and business-ruled man but, Alcott had heard, a genial and jovial man nevertheless.

Lovers came, as lovers will. The lady was too charming and had too much freedom. She was innocent and guileless, but her husband was not the barrier needed. Alcott said he thought she was of noble sort and was betrayed by her idea that human beings had character.

He was not precise as to the dilemma she had

entered, how or why she entered it. A man of reputation for discreet gallantry, a handsome man of attractive culture, was encouraged by her frank and unchilled attitude toward him to try a desperate measure.

There was a designing servant in the house. The lover corrupted the servant and was introduced into the house. The husband was supposed to be away on a business trip. He came back, ahead of time, as husbands sometimes do, and stopped at his club before he went home.

A friend of the lover saw him, and knowing what was being essayed at the man's home, was aghast. He induced other friends of the lover to try to detain the husband on one jovial pretext or another while he communicated with the house. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to use the telephone. The other men were unsuccessful in their attempt to detain the husband. The friend began a race with the husband to reach the house. Unluckily for him, the cab he took not only was pulled by the faster horse but, he being conscious that it was a race and the husband being unconscious of it, his driver had reasons given him for speed.

It was unfortunate for the friend, because there was a tragedy later, and he was its victim. He arrived in time to warn the lover. The lady, appalled by the appearance of the lover, aghast to

consider that she had been thought so unworthy as to attract these attentions, and suffering from a confusion which blunted her judgment, had not called her servants but had endeavoured with a dignity consciously self-compromised to assert her self-respect and recall her lover's reason.

In a turmoil of abasing emotions she was engaged in this effort of self-control and assertion of dignity when the friend destroyed all composure by his announcement. The lover went instantly, out of a window. The friend, having his own dignity of innocence, would not compromise his self-respect in this fashion. The husband arrived upon a scene which could not be explained. His wife, in spite of her efforts at control, was in hysteria. The friend's presence was inexplicable. Arrangements were made to satisfy honour. The friend was killed in a fashion satisfactory to the police and wholly satisfactory to the outraged husband.

There was the situation: an innocent man dead, a wronged husband satisfied, the wife absolved by the romantic, lying statement of the man who sacrificed himself, that in the transaction he had been presumptuous and the wife entirely guiltless—and the guilty lover gone scot-free. But the servant knew. Tremendous possibilities in this, Alcott thought.

Then Alcott went to other stories. As he drank

more, he made them personal. I felt sick. It was outrageous for my recollection to emphasise his merely incidental remark:

“It might have been Montevideo.”

CHAPTER XIX

IT may seem unreasonable that a story by a man incidentally met, an indifferent acquaintance, had started a solvent at work on my mysteries. I am discussing, now, matters I had tried to keep out of my consciousness. Things at Hartley had insisted upon an explanation which I did not want to find or give. I had put them out of my mind time after time, but they always came back.

I could not kill a curiosity, although I was shamed by it. I felt indecent in my almost involuntary conjectures regarding Mrs. Sidney. Circumstances did demand an explanation. No one could perceive the strange facts of the house and not speculate as to their cause. It might be unpleasant to do so, but it was impossible not to do so. The predominating fact, however, was that my folks were coming home, and I knew that my affection for Mrs. Sidney had become a sacrament and my affection for Isobel a tragedy.

The yacht brought these dear people to the landing in the river at Hartley House. I, in the city, was called on the telephone by Isobel. There was a dynamic value in the inspiration of her voice.

She was, in her greeting, cheery and wholesome. It was a glad, clean "Hullo!"—crisp and jovial.

My people came home in May, and the day after their arrival I went back to Hartley House with my belongings, rejoicing, in an ecstasy, to take the well-known ride into the wonderful world of fancy and endeared companionship, by the haunted pool and into the jovial household.

Jed, I knew as soon as I saw him, was changed—not violently but in some fashion and perceptibly. Mr. Sidney was not. His geniality could not change. He made me feel that he had missed me and was rejoiced to see me again. Mrs. Sidney seemed, spiritually, to continue to lean on me for support, a thing that I perceived in abasement and with a sense of unworthiness and unreliability. Isobel was as wholesome as the air. In the most pleasant circumstances life was resumed at Hartley House.

Jed had not wholly lost his truculence and his occasional flashes of malevolence, but he was subdued. I thought he seemed furtive. He impressed me as if he were guarding himself against something he could not see, something he must watch for over his shoulder.

I asked Mrs. Sidney if she had observed a change. She said it had not occurred to her to think of it as a change, but there had been a difference for which she was grateful. She did not hate Jed—

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he was so serviceable. When he ceased to annoy or terrorise her, she was happy that he was in the household to aid Mr. Sidney in his pursuit of genial happiness.

She remembered that when they were making their visit to Montevideo, Jed had gone down to the docks and had come back obviously disturbed. She had observed the fact without giving much thought to it. She was not sure but that there had been an amelioration of Jed since then. She had regarded the event as insignificant. It might have had a meaning, but if so, it was obscured.

Our days were of pleasant routine, but nevertheless, for reasons which I have tried to make perceptible if not explicit, the expectation was touched by dread. We had, for several months, no outstanding incident or disturbing happening. Mr. Sidney's health remained exceptionally good. He created a new interest in his life: he had not forgotten his visit to the penitentiary, and he was eager to do what he could for the convicts.

Evidently he thought of his restricted life as something not wholly alien, except for its comforts, to theirs. The most that he could do was to send books and occasionally to prepare a Sunday afternoon program of music to be given by a small orchestra which he had brought out from the city. He never went back to the penitentiary, but once a week either Jed or I drove over, and he was

interested in our accounts. Once he said to me:

"Occasionally I think of that old wreck of a fellow in the penitentiary library. Probably it is because he is the tangible thing of our ghost-story. Do they talk much of that story?"

"I do not think that they talk much of it," I said, "but I have an idea that it is somewhere in the background of nearly everybody's imagination about here."

"It is peculiar," he said, "what a fascination a ghost-legend has for unthinking people—or is it really peculiar? It is their literature. I wish our ghost would walk more of a windy night, such as this."

Jed was beginning to wear off the fine aspects of his good behaviour. Some restless ambition tortured this man, and some power he had not completely used invited him to make full use of it.

I had implored Mrs. Sidney to inform me instantly if he became obnoxious again. I understood how important it was to protect Mr. Sidney's peace of mind, but I thought I had the upper hand of Jed—although not understanding his case at all—and could manage him.

Isobel, knowing that she was pursued by the ridiculous ambitions of the man, found amusement in it. I found only moral nausea. I could see Jed's arrogance arising again, and twice of a week I was awakened by his singing in the hallway as

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he came from drinking in Mr. Sidney's room. I was expecting something to happen; and something did, but it was certainly not what I expected. It opened up a new phase of the mystery.

CHAPTER XX

ONE morning I was waiting for Jed to bring my coffee to the pleasant room which he early in our acquaintance had recommended. Not the least curious thing about Jed was the fact that he seldom in his sober moments was anything but a perfect servant when service was demanded. It did not matter how serious and deadly the issue might be between Jed and me as men; when the matter lay between Jed and me as servant and served, Jed was the servant.

It may have been habit, principle or policy. I am not certain that it was not principle; I have never seen a man so abandoned as not to have egotism. I think it was a principle with Jed to be a good servant when he pretended to be one. He had a larger part in the house, whatever that part was; but his pride required that, when pretence or duty made him a servant, he be an efficient servant. Therefore, no matter how things might stand with us when, in the morning at an early hour, I went to the room Jed originally suggested, I expected him to come with my coffee, and he always did.

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It was my habit to arise at seven o'clock and be dressed and in this room by half-past seven. By this time the gardeners had taken the mastiffs and Airedales to the kennels, and the lawns and groves were safe. I usually read a book until Jed brought the coffee and the morning paper. It was a luxurious and restful experience to have this hour each day.

This morning in question I was reading placidly when looking out the window, I was startled to see a strange figure of a man on the lawn. He was close to the house, almost under my window, and I even could see that he wore earrings. He had a handkerchief around his neck. He was swarthy and black-haired. I thought he was Spanish, and I thought he was a sailor. These were only impressions, but they identified him for me later. He was passive and was looking up at the house in an interested but puzzled fashion, harmlessly, one would have said, if the wholly unexpected nature of his presence had not been in itself significant.

Men wearing earrings were not so common of sight as to allow one wearing them to be unnoticed. Strangers of any kind seldom came our way. Strangers of his kind were extraordinary. He was looking up at the windows as if he sought the answer to something that had interested if not mystified him. I knew, in every instinct, that

he had not come in by chance but by design.

I was looking, leaning forward, at this strange phenomenon on the lawn when a crash of metal and breaking china gave me a shock. Jed—whom I had not heard entering—had seen over my shoulder the stranger on the lawn and had dropped the coffee-tray.

Jed may have suspected I carried a pistol. I had no more than caught a glimpse of his white, alarmed face when he sprang at me and grabbed at my hip pocket. I had a pistol in the pocket at which he reached, but I intercepted his movement before he got the weapon.

“Let me have it,” he begged. “Just a minute!”

I got a hold of his wrist, which stopped him, and he whimpered. Then he broke away and showed himself at the window. At this the man on the lawn smiled with a joyousness that was a triumph. He indicated in a flash that he had found what he had sought. He smiled so that I could see the white of his teeth. He had been uncertain and puzzled when I first saw him looking up at the windows of the house. With Jed framed in one of the windows, he was triumphant and rejoicing. Whatever he wanted he had found something which pleased him.

Jed was furious, the more furious because he was helpless. He would have murdered the man on the lawn if he had had any means of doing so.

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He was so furious that he did not care how he revealed himself to me.

The man on the lawn stood laughing for a moment and then walked slowly away toward the brush, into which he disappeared. Jed hung out of the window watching him.

"Well, sir," I said, "I think we have you under a real restraint at last."

"I was mad that the fellow should have come up to the house that way. Some tramp!"

"And you dropped the coffee-tray and tried to get my pistol. A perfectly natural proceeding on seeing an unknown tramp!"

"We don't want strangers about here," he said.

"You don't want that man," I said. "And he is not a stranger. When he saw you, he smiled as if he had found what he was looking for."

Jed was unhappy and showed it.

"I wish you were a friend, Doctor," he said. "I try to make you one. I will get you your coffee."

He sent in a maid to sweep up the breakage from the coffee-tray, and presently he came with another pot and cup. He had steadied down but was not tranquil.

"You know that man," I said, "and you wanted to kill him."

"I never saw him before," he said.

"You have had some sort of dealing with him."

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He has been hunting for you. He has found you. I think we are going to find you more interesting, Jed. The man will remain in the neighbourhood; I think you are going to have some unpleasant hours. The thought does not make me unhappy."

"I wish I could find a friend in this house," said Jed.

"I wish you could deserve one," I said.

CHAPTER XXI

MY description of Hartley House has been so sketchy and indifferent that it may not have included mention of the formal gardens which took in the river side of the place. They were charming at all times but particularly so at sunset, when the radiance was behind the western hills two miles across the water and was reflected in the clouds back off our own eastern hills. The shore at this point was narrow, and the river was wide. Hills, river and bottom-lands formed an intimate sanctuary which evening glorified.

To the north the gardens terminated at a high brick wall against which hollyhocks grew and now were in gorgeous blossom. The hollyhock to me connotes substantial human relationship. It suggests a permanency in affections and a continuity in life. People have lived, loved and suffered where hollyhocks grow luxuriantly, and the hollyhock preserves the tradition and the record of their lives.

Jed had joined me in the garden, and we were sitting on a stone bench facing the river not fifty feet from the brick wall and the hollyhocks to the

north. Jed was expected within a quarter of an hour to join Mr. Sidney. He seemed dejected and worried—in a fashion timid, I thought.

When he came to sit down beside me, I resented the intrusion for a moment; but knowing that he had only a few moments in which to impose his presence upon me, I did not make him feel any more unwelcome than ordinarily he knew himself to be. I don't know what fascination I had for the man. I suppose every human being needs to keep his isolation from becoming that of a pariah, even if he chooses to isolate himself. Jed knew that he had nothing like a friend in the house except Mrs. Sidney, and evidently his egotism demanded a friendly association upon some other basis. But he found me a disappointment.

A schooner deep in the water with brick from up the river had just come in sight around a point above, and with dirty sails spread to the light wind was caught in the glorification of the water. A catbird was hopping in and out of the shrubbery, and even with Jed by my side I was sentient and content.

It was not a noise that attracted my attention. It must have been the sensation of being stared at. I turned my head toward the wall to the north. In line with the bench on which we sat, and just topping the wall, was the head of the Spanish sailor.

He and I looked at each other for what seemed to be at least a moment. His earrings glittered. His gaze was steady and both inquiring and purposeful. Even in inquiry it seemed malignant, with the malice which comes from a sense of injury.

I felt a decidedly unpleasant shock with the creeps which come from a good ghost-story. If he had appeared suddenly at full length somewhere in the garden, walking about, it would have been different. But just his head appearing above the wall, and he perfectly unexpected, unexplained, motionless and inquiring—it gave you the shivers of a child frightened at night in the nursery.

“You’re poor company,” said Jed, “but I am too, and I have to go to Mr. Sidney.”

I seemed not to hear him. It was not intended to rebuff him; I was held by the Spaniard’s eyes. Jed went into a huff and said: “Oh, go to the devil.”

Then he also turned and saw the head above the wall.

He arose and stood looking at the Spaniard as intently as the Spaniard was looking at him. This situation lasted a full minute, without a movement or word from one of us. Then the Spaniard’s face, graven in lines of malevolent purpose, softened into a smile which expressed satisfaction with prospects. And then the head disappeared suddenly.

I was in doubt whether the man's feet had gone out from under him, or whether he had jumped.

In disappearing he left the place where he had been, charged with the mystery which his presence had indicated. His disappearance intensified, thickened, the atmosphere which his presence had created. While his head was above the wall, the sensation was one of nervous astonishment. When his head disappeared, the suggestion of terror was added. So long as we saw him, it was something unexplained but embodied; when he dropped out of sight, it was as if a person going down a hall in his house by candlelight at night were to come upon a startling sight, and—at the moment when his perceptions and reason were struggling to explain the object and its presence and to sustain his courage—the candlelight should go out in a gust of wind and leave him blind, facing a thing he had not explained and now could no longer see. Then, with cause, may the hairs crowning even a head with a thinking brain arise in sheer fright. The person's plight is that of black ignorance, in which superstition and childish fears ascend and dominate.

Jed took a step forward as if in pursuit, but stopped with that one movement. It broke the situation down and made it possible for me to return to animation. Seemingly my powers of movement and speech had been suspended. I

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looked at Jed, who was as pitifully frightened as a child in the dark. He made every demonstration of fright except wailing. Then he braced himself, recovered his courage and without saying anything went into the house to join Mr. Sidney.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN I saw Mr. Sidney that evening he made a remark in joke that Jed was ill and needed my attention.

"I have not had the usual satisfaction of my wine," he said, "and I know it is because Jed is not in condition."

"I'm not well, Mr. Sidney," said Jed. "I didn't want to say anything about it, because I didn't want to interfere with your evening, but since you mention it, I'll admit it."

"Go on along then, Jed," said Mr. Sidney. "Go and have the Doctor look you over."

"I'm not sick," said Jed almost angrily, "but I know I'm bad company. I'll go to bed."

"You'd better, Jed," said Mr. Sidney. "You've almost soured my wine."

"There's something wrong with the man," I said as Jed left, "but it isn't physical."

"So I imagined," said Mr. Sidney. "He's as strong as an ox. He's got the constitution of an onion. However, he's not himself to-night, and that's all there is to that. Will you read to me?"

It was eleven o'clock when I went to my room. I was glad of my release, although it had been a

pleasant evening. For a dead or a dying man—for a living and live man, for that matter—Mr. Sidney had extraordinary manners and great charm. He gave a dignity and worth to life by his very manner of leaving it. In going from it, he proved it to be worth while—which, I suspect, is the highest accomplishment of the real gentleman.

He accepted life as something which, properly lived, is innately valuable. It was a jewel to be had and handed on. It was wonderfully cut and with many facets, could be held and possessed for a while, and given to others.

After I had gone to my room, I found myself restless and thought I might find rest in a walk. I expected to be joined by my friends the mastiffs and Airedales as soon as I was outside, but not a dog appeared. This was enough to be noticed, but not enough, at the time, to be given significance.

The Airedales, after a day of confinement, frequently ranged in a pack far over the grounds. The mastiffs were steady, but they might find company, in the early part of night, in the kitchen or garage. It was merely an incident to be noticed that no dogs came to meet me. I walked about for a while and reentered the house with quieter nerves.

I found that I was tired. Ordinarily I liked at least an hour's reading just before bed, but this night I wanted sleep.

I was grateful for the mood and the opportunity, and I yawned once or twice as I got into my pajamas.

I do not know when I went to sleep or how soon thereafter I awakened. It was possibly only two hours later. I did not look at my watch, for the very good reason that other things at the time were more important. A bright moonlight was shining, and whatever had awakened me, the moonlight showed me good cause to be awake. In a window which the moonlight touched with full, illuminating force, was a face recognisable as that of the Spanish sailor.

Again only his head was visible, but this time he was in my bedroom window and seemingly trying for entrance into my room. This may seem a more ghastly proceeding than his appearance above the wall early in the evening, but really it was not. I had the shock of unpleasant astonishment, but I felt, to my satisfaction, the ability to handle the situation. I was not frightened by the appearance of the head in my window. I suppose it is because the appearance suggested burglars, and burglars are conventional.

I lay quietly in bed and wondered how much more than the head I should see. Just then I was blinded by the light of an electric flash-light hitting me full in the eyes.

A second later the flash was gone, the face in

the window was gone and a slight movement on the gravel below showed me that my visitor was gone. I got up and looked out. Although the lawn was bright in the moonlight, no one was to be seen. The Spaniard had disappeared into the woods.

To come to an understanding of the sailor's acts, not much reasoning was needed: it was not my room he was trying to enter, but Jed's. His flashlight had not only shown that I was awake but that he had the wrong man, and he had climbed down and run into the woods. One mystery was how he had escaped the dogs.

CHAPTER XXIII

THAT was explained the next day: they had not been loose the night before; they had not been released from their kennels. They were found restless from an unexpected night of confinement. They had not been out because the stableman who had charge of them had spent the afternoon and night in the village of Hartley, drunk.

It was an extraordinary and not an ordinary proceeding for this stableman, who had been a dependable character. It did not require much suspicion to conjecture that he had been tampered with in deliberate purpose to free the grounds of the dogs for the use the Spanish sailor made when he climbed up to my room.

The stableman, proved delinquent, was so apparently contrite and innocent that it would have been an injustice to punish or discharge him. He had gone to the village in the early afternoon on an assigned mission for the house. He had used the opportunity to drink a few glasses of beer, for which proceeding no one would blame him in Hartley House. It seems that he drank two or three glasses more than he intended to and, even beer being in a fashion intoxicating, got into a condition

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which made him amiable to the approach of a stranger who succeeded in interesting him in the immediate prospects of life, which then to him were chiefly alcoholic.

He and the stranger had much talk and many drinks. The stableman lost all sense of responsibility, which was not strange, and proceeded from beer to strong liquor, forgetting all his duties to the house. In consequence he did not get home that night, and the dogs were not loose.

Naturally one drew a direct line from this performance to the appearance of the Spaniard at my window, and there was natural wonder as to what kind of confederate the Spaniard could have so effectually to prepare the way for him.

The stableman expected nothing less than discharge when he learned, from servants' gossip, what had happened as the result of his indiscretions. He may have been astonished to discover that there was no intent to punish him—I do not know. But there was no such intent—only a very earnest effort to find out what he had encountered.

The Spaniard had a confederate who was ingenious and resourceful: that was evident. He had made a deliberate play to get the dogs out of the way the night the sailor made his attempt to get into Jed's room, and had succeeded in almost getting into mine.

Two days after the strange appearances of the

Spaniard, I was asked for and was told that a gentleman desired to see me. I went to the office of the house and saw a man who instantly suggested the one who had entertained the stableman so successfully.

He was so easily described that it was a crime for even a drunken stableman to have missed his distinguishing characteristics, but at that, the stableman had made identification possible. The moment I saw the fellow I thought we were nearer the solution of the mystery of Hartley House. I did not care to be nearer to it, unless I could be of help to people of whom I had come to be very fond; but thinking that thus I could be of help, I was eager to get the information needed.

He was a significantly insignificant-looking man: that was his identifying mark. He seemed timid and insecure of himself, apologetic for his intrusion upon me and withal determined to do whatever it was that was in his program. I wondered how so shrinking an individual had played a jovial part in a village tavern with yokels at drink. His card indicated him to be a lawyer and gave his name as Philetus M. Brown. He came directly to his subject—for which I thanked him—as soon as he had made a brief preliminary of commonplaces of introduction and greeting.

“I have asked for you, Doctor, because I know of no one else here who will serve. I do not wish

to approach Mr. Sidney directly and cannot trust the factotum you know as Jed. I would not impose upon Mrs. Sidney or her daughter except in extremity. You are here, a rational human being and interested, I am informed, in the fortunes of this family. Therefore I have come to you."

"For what purpose?" I asked.

He smiled as if to apologise for having any purpose, and pulled at the cuffs of his coat.

"I'll be frank," he said. "I hardly know the purpose clearly myself. My client is a sailor. My practice lies considerably along the water-front in the city. It has not made me rich. Probably nothing could have made me rich. I have lost a good deal of egotism and have become pragmatic. I have to get along and to deal with facts. There are people dependent upon me, and I have not been much to depend upon."

"The condition of your finances or your morals cannot be of interest to me," I said. "What have you that is of interest?"

He smiled as if he was used frequently to rebuff.

"What I have, I assure you, humiliates me to present, because I realise that if I succeed for my client, I shall be in the way of blackmailing Mr. Sidney. My consolation is that I am only an agent and I am sure that I shall be a more considerate and honest one than any other this ignorant sailor would find. It has been necessary for me

to know many languages to make my small living. My Spanish client does not know much if any English. He has been a man of precarious manner of living, and it seems that several years ago he was in the employ of Mr. Sidney."

"Where was that?" I asked.

The little man pulled at his coat-cuffs and smiled again.

"My client being Spanish and Mr. Sidney having lived many years in Montevideo, it might be assumed that it was there," he said. "It was there, and my client came into possession of a document—by dishonest means, I suspect—of which he now retains only one page. I wish to leave a copy of this page with you, and later to find out to what extent it interests Mr. Sidney."

"You mean—to find out if he will submit to blackmail," I said.

"I anticipated your remark," he said. "I look at the matter differently. If Mr. Sidney has something to conceal, we shall be glad to help him to conceal it. I will leave a copy of the page from the document with you, and with your permission will see you later."

He handed me a long envelope and with a bow asked to be shown to the door. Jed, not suspecting that the little man had any connection with the sailor, showed him out.

CHAPTER XXIV

I WENT to my room to examine the paper which had been left with me. It was accompanied by an explanatory statement by "Att. Philetus M. Brown." I will give the explanatory statement first.

"Memoranda for Dr. Michelson: The accompanying typewritten sheet is a part of a document stolen from Mr. Sidney in Montevideo ten years ago by Alejandro Dravada, then a servant in the capacity of porter. Dravada preserves the original, of which I have had several typewritten copies made. Dravada had the complete document in his hands, but only for a short while. He had discovered, in the course of several years' service under Mr. Sidney in Montevideo, that a strong-box in Mr. Sidney's room was particularly guarded. He supposed it contained jewels. He is, I should judge, a person of small moral character and great cupidity. He determined to steal the box, hoping that its contents would enable him to get married and set himself up in a small business.

"He succeeded in getting the box, by entering Mr. Sidney's room, but before he could make his

escape he was unfortunate enough to be discovered by another servant, known to you as Jed. Jed levelled a revolver at my client and made him surrender the box.

"I can only conjecture here—frequently this case has caused me to conjecture; but I think that the man Jed, although he knew something valuable was contained in the box, thought, as did my Spanish client, that it was personal property; and, unlike my client, he was not careless of property rights. This conjecture may not interest you, but I imagine you asking: 'Why did not Jed steal the box he afterward took from my client?' It was, I think, because the man Jed was by nature honest, and it was only when his inhibitions had been broken down by the sight of another man committing a crime which had been easier for him to commit, that he lost control of his morals. My position in this matter is so equivocal that I feel impelled to give you every conjecture I have been able to form.

"The man Jed took the box. My client, desperate at finding himself robbed of his loot, armed himself immediately and broke into Jed's room shortly thereafter. He found Jed disconsolately looking at a mass of papers, which was all the supposed jewel-casket contained.

"In this disappointing occupation Jed was aroused by the stealthy entrance of my client

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through a window, but there was no conflict. Jed pointed to the papers and laughed. My client was shrewd enough to read Jed's emotions. He knew that the treasure-trove had proved a soap-bubble. He is a man of violent temper. In his double disappointment he sprang at Jed, stabbed him in the shoulder, seized the papers, scattered them about the room and jumped out of the window.

"If this had been all, I should have no client in this case. But in his rage Dravada, when he was throwing the papers about, had unconsciously retained one sheet in his clenched fist. He found it in his fist when he came out of his senseless and inordinate rage later; and then, his natural cupidity and cunning reasserted, he realised that something was being guarded in the box; that something being only papers, it must follow that the papers were valuable. He reproached himself that his anger had defeated his judgment when it was possible for him to take the entire contents of the box. He did not dare go back: he had stabbed Jed; the house might be alarmed. He had only a single sheet of the guarded manuscript. It is a copy of that sheet which you find here.

"I said I would give you my conjectures. You will ask first why I am so candid in committing to writing a communication of this nature. It is because: first, I prefer to write it, owing to a physical timidity in conversation; and second, but

equally important, because I know the last thing Mr. Sidney or any true friend of Mr. Sidney's desires is to have the story, of which this is a page, made public.

"I do not know what this story is, but I know who does know what it is. That person is the man Jed—now, as before, a servant of Mr. Sidney. I have made sufficient inquiry as to the position of Jed in the household of Mr. Sidney to know that he retains the manuscript found in the box, or if he does not retain it, knows its contents.

"The visit of Mr. Sidney and his family to Montevideo this winter betrayed Jed's whereabouts to Dravada. He came north after they had sailed. His cupidity has determination. I think your man Jed appreciates that. I think from what Dravada has told me, in his simple boasting fashion, that Jed was dismayed to see him again in Montevideo.

"My client's first impulse, having followed Jed to the United States, was to get at this secret by force or theft, but he sees the physical difficulties in the way; and being, except in his violent moments, a reasonable man, he has had recourse to an attorney to obtain such settlement as his knowledge may be worth.

"I do not wish to defend my course in the matter. I suggest merely that Mr. Sidney and all concerned will fare the better for having a man of consideration and discretion, such as I flatter my-

self I am, intervening between them and a man of the moral completion indicated by my client. I shall be at your disposal, Doctor, within any reasonable time. I leave it to your judgment to handle the matter within Hartley House."

The copy of manuscript which accompanied the letter was as follows:

" . . . would be fatal to the success of what I have done and intend to do if this confession were to be found. It might be asked, then, why expose myself and my happiness to the chance of discovery of things which I may lock forever by simply forgetting. It is sufficient answer to that question to admit that for me I could not be content unless it were certain that what I have done should be known. I want the record of it preserved. When I am dead I want the record of it known. It increases my satisfaction to know that I shall cause moralists to be indignant. I want to be known as a criminal. I want my crime to be talked about. I want it remembered. That is the savour of my life. It would be impossible for me to obtain a sufficient satisfaction unless I made it possible for the story of a crime to be known sometime. So long as I live, I shall need and seek concealment; but I should not be happy unless I could anticipate disclosure. My crime"

that was all.

Several persons—two at least: Dravada and Att. vn—knew as much as I had read. Three persons, in the house, Mr. Sidney, Mrs. Sidney and knew the story completely.

It was this knowledge which had given Jed his role in the house, Mrs. Sidney her unhappiness, Mr. Sidney some of his pleasures.

CHAPTER XXV

THE search for a solvent of the Hartley House mysteries was insistent. Alcott's incidental remark came back to me: "It might have been Montevideo."

I felt uncomfortable to recall this, ashamed and abashed, as if in recalling it I had done something to lower myself in my self-respect. I had to go to Mrs. Sidney with the information and insinuations Attorney Philetus M. Brown had given me. My desire was to protect her from precisely this kind of trouble; my necessity was to carry the trouble to her. I had to know how to act.

By way of preliminary I told her of the three appearances of the Spaniard and then of the appearance of the lawyer. When I offered her the sheet of paper containing a transcript of a page of Mr. Sidney's diary, her hands trembled, but she took the sheet resolutely. She was greatly alarmed but regained her composure.

She read the page hurriedly and then more carefully and, it seemed, with relief.

"I have to deal with these men," I said, "and I must know how to do it. They can be dealt with

by criminal law if there is no reason why protection should not be sought in that fashion."

"There is," said Mrs. Sidney, "and I cannot tell you the reason."

"You know that I do not ask for it," I said.

"You know there is something very strange about this house?"

"That was evident in twenty-four hours," I said, "but it means nothing to me. I am not curious. I merely want to know how to deal with these men."

"It is not a lack of confidence in you that keeps me from telling what is wrong here," said Mrs. Sidney. "It would be a relief to do so. There have been times when I could hardly keep myself from taking the help and protection which your knowledge of the situation would give me. It has been hard to stand it all alone, John."

I was glad, for the first time consciously, that my name was John. It had an honest, straightforward sound, suggesting the plain, honest dealing that might be needed in this house.

"The reason I do not tell you, John," said Mrs. Sidney, "is because I would not have another conscience distressed. You could never again be really happy if you knew the story of which this sheet is a page. You could not do me any good if you knew it. You would only torment yourself."

"So much for that," I said. "I take your judg-

ment. But how am I to deal with these fellows?"

Mrs. Sidney hesitated.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm sure I don't know."

"Do you know a man named Dravada?" I asked. "Did you know him when you lived in Montevideo? Can you tell me anything about him without telling something that you do not want to?"

"I can tell you about Dravada," said Mrs. Sidney. "Mr. Sidney was head of a shipping firm. Dravada had been a sailor. He had come to be a porter or stevedore about the docks. We needed a porter at home, and Mr. Sidney brought this man from the docks to fill the position. He was a docile creature, very strong and useful, and never annoying. . . . Now I will tell you as much as I possibly can without doing you a great injustice."

"We had lived in Montevideo fifteen years when Jed came to us. He has been with us ever since. Mr. Sidney began writing the manuscript, of which this is a copy of one sheet, the year Jed came. It was a postponed desire which grew stronger as it was denied."

"The only reason I do not tell what the manuscript contains is because I value your peace of mind. I know from my own experience that your conscience never would be at rest if you had full knowledge, and yet you would be entirely helpless."

So out of consideration for you I shall not tell you more than I have to.

"Mr. Sidney never has had the slightest scruple as to what he has done; he rejoices in it. You have spoken of his will to live; what I am holding back from you would explain it. He says in this page of his manuscript which you have seen that it perfects his satisfaction to leave a record of his crime. I know that it does. I understand that he had to have it known after his death that he had done what he had.

"Jed's family name is Arliss. He was a sailor on a British ship which sailed from Montevideo to Liverpool, and he became tired of sea work. Mr. Sidney had seen him about the wharf and had been attracted to him. They had talked enough for Mr. Sidney to learn of Jed's ambition for a comfortable life on shore. Mr. Sidney gave him the chance to realise it in our house.

"Jed, after he was taken into the house, found that Mr. Sidney used great precautions with something which he locked in a box. When Dravada came, he also saw the box which Mr. Sidney seemed to guard so carefully. Dravada decided to steal whatever was in the box. Jed found him in the act. They fought, but Jed retained the contents—Mr. Sidney's manuscript."

"Then Jed knows the secret?" I asked.

"He does."

"And Dravada does not?"

"He cannot know any more than you know from reading this one sheet from the manuscript."

"Where is the manuscript?"

"Jed has it."

"Does Mr. Sidney know that?"

"Not yet. You have been wondering at Jed's control in the house. He has the manuscript, and he knows the story which for your own sake I would not have you know. He imposes upon his knowledge."

"But doesn't Mr. Sidney ever want to see the manuscript he sets such store by?" I asked.

"No. He wants to know it is in his strong-box. If he ever finds that it is not, we shall have to meet the situation somehow. God knows how."

"Then this sailor and this blackmailing lawyer know no more than I know now?"

"No more, so far as I am aware."

CHAPTER XXVI

BROWN, the lawyer, came to Hartley House the next day to see me. I think he regarded his plan of blackmail as irresistible. I wonder that he did not have an express wagon and a large chest with him. He was amiable and expectant.

"You have decided," he said as Jed, having brought him to me on the porch, went away. He had his cane and his gloves and his nap-worn suit.

"You get nothing," I said, "and may act upon that information."

The disappointment was unpleasant to him. If I wanted to dramatise the effect, I'd say it was catastrophic. He sat down suddenly in the nearest wicker chair, and his face became ugly in appearance.

"You must know, Doctor," he said, "that I am nerved to the performance of my duty by the thought of a wife and two daughters for whom I have provided indifferently. I will not say that their situation is desperate, but it may make me desperate. I feel that we have a claim here which might easily be adjusted."

"You use a number of euphemisms for blackmail," I said, "and none of them conceals your

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meaning. If your wife and daughters are in need, you might approach Mrs. Sidney as the almoner of Mr. Sidney's charities. That, at least, would be an honest statement of your case, and it might be effective."

He brightened at once.

"I thank you for a lesson in procedure," he said. "We shall consider it upon such an understanding."

I saw the mistake I had made.

"I assure you," I said, "you may consider nothing upon the terms you wish to have considered in this house. If your family is in need, you may present the case as a case of need. It will be wholly unrelated to your present demand. Your attempt at blackmail is so unconsidered that you may go shriek to the world or to the prosecuting attorney. The family is not interested in you or your client."

The shabby little fellow seemed to get blue-nosed and blue-lipped in disappointment.

"I am sure you cannot have considered your interests," he said.

"What interests?" I asked.

"The interests of the family. Mr. and Mrs. Sidney certainly do not want a scandal."

"Certainly not. How are they threatened with one?"

"But the manuscript indicates one."

"Does it? I have read it, and I know nothing. You have read it. What do you know?"

"I can read English," he said with spirit. "I can understand that when a man uses the word 'crime,' he means crime. I read in Mr. Sidney's handwriting that he had committed a crime and that he was committing an indiscretion in putting the account on paper."

"I cannot correct your convictions," I said. "You must use your best judgment. You have our permission to do anything that suggests itself to you."

"You're going to brazen it out," he cried.

"We are not going to do anything at all," I said, "not seeing any necessity for doing anything. I might merely suggest to you that there are legal provisions against blackmail."

The quiet little man, with his notions of profit evaporating, suddenly became savage and desperate.

"I can't be fooled with," he cried. "I know you. You won't assail me with a blackmail charge, because you do not dare. You think I do not know enough, but you will not take a chance of prosecuting me. I know I am guilty and can be punished unless I have a real hold on this family. I have taken the chance that I have a real hold. It was not certain, but now I know it. It is not enough of a hold, but it is enough to keep you from

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making trouble for me, and I'll see that soon it will be enough to make you listen to me."

"You may do anything you want to do," I said.

He became quiet and cunning again.

"Then, if you don't mind, I'd like to speak to Jed," he said.

I rang for him.

When Jed came, the little shabby lawyer became excited again and got up out of his chair to shake his finger at Jed.

"You are in for trouble," he said. "We know what you have, and we'll get it. They don't dare stop us, and I want to give you notice that you are marked. That's all. You'll be followed and hounded and run down in the end, and there'll be an end to this superciliousness here. It may be when you're dead.

"That's a threat, and the people in this house can make the best of it. I'm in this case to stay, and my Spanish client is not easily discouraged or controlled. You have chosen to deal with us in this fashion. Now we'll deal with you in our fashion. We'll get the rest of this evidence, and we'll make you pay ten times more than we'd be willing to settle for now. We've got an equity in this matter, and we're going to collect it. We know all about you, my friend Jed, and we'll show you that we do. Where's my cane and hat? I'm going to get out of here. You'll regret it."

“Jed,” I said, “show the gentleman where the door is and don’t let the dogs attack him on the way out.”

A disappointed shyster went away in a hurry. I was not only perplexed but alarmed. Of the rapacity of the little man, of his lack of conscience and morals, I had no doubt at all. My only question was whether he could make his malevolence and cupidity effective.

Jed showed him to the door and then came back. I could see that he was frightened nearly to death.

CHAPTER XXVII

I HAD begun to understand Jed better. He had periods in which passion unsettled his reason and destroyed his normal restraints. In these passions he was dangerous. His mind then seemed to be in a tempest. He became malevolent and abusive.

He did not remain constantly under the dominance of these passions. His case would have been simple to understand if he had been constantly pressing a purpose, but he was not. His rascality was not adroit and it was not consistent. He could have ruined what was left of Mr. Sidney's colourful life but he never was to the old man anything but a considerate servant, except when he seemed rather to be a jovial friend. He had a strong affection for Mr. Sidney. When I fully perceived that, I had begun to understand Jed. He was a periodic villain to every one except Mr. Sidney.

His experiences with the Spaniard and the lawyer unnerved him for a week. I was glad to see retribution at his door, but when I saw how he kept an amiable and jovial composure in the pres-

ence of Mr. Sidney, I had reluctantly to concede to myself that I had an unworthy feeling of admiration for the rascal.

He was greatly terrified, for reasons which he knew better than I, at the idea of death. It was physically and spiritually abhorrent to him. I had talked enough with him to know that he was an unnatural egotist, although nearly all egotists are natural.

Dissolution as a certainty is not a comfortable thought to any human being, but it is supportable chiefly because the ordinary human being admits it once into his perceptions and then denies it. Jed was such an unnatural egotist that he could not deny the idea. He constantly embraced it and constantly was dismayed by it. He was too important to have been born without purpose and to die without accomplishment. That thought terrified and agonised him. He was dying all the time mentally.

Jed was glad to drink heavily because it reduced his world to endurable form. When he was alcoholised he was jovial and the world was jovial. He feared prospects. He was not particularly afraid of things that stood before him. In the first week after the episodes of the Spaniard and the lawyer, he said several times:

"I wouldn't mind if I had them where I could deal with them."

I realised that it was the invisibility of his danger which made him long for something dangerous in tangible form. If the Spaniard and the lawyer had wanted to devise an exquisite torture for their victim, they could have adopted no better expedient than that of disappearing. Their absence abandoned Jed to his imaginings.

He made a wonderful showing of stoicism, but I saw him break down completely three times the first week when nerves got the better of him. In spite of the satisfaction his discomfort gave me, I felt sorry for him.

"Those fellows are harmless, Jed," I said. "Why don't you regard them as such?"

"I don't fool myself, Doctor. They are not harmless. I wish I knew their scheme. It's this waiting in the dark that paralyses me. If they'd come out openly, I'd feel relieved, even if it made the danger imminent."

"Why don't you go away?"

"This is the only place I possibly could be safe. There is a protection here."

"Why don't you conform to these men's desires?"

"Do you know this secret, Doctor?"

"I do not. I do not want to know it."

"You are a strange man. Well, I'm a strange man myself. Believe me or not, merely for Mr. Sidney's sake I'd not tell them or help them, even

if there were no advantage to me in not telling."

"You admit there is an advantage?"

"I know I seem a scoundrel."

"You mean you know you are one."

"No, I'm not, not a thorough one," he said stoutly. "I've had a narrow life. I've wanted a better one. I've had ambitions and aspirations. I had a romantic, reading boyhood. I've read nearly all the fiction there is, good fiction. I've had a hard life. I owe it to myself not to die disappointed with nothing accomplished. I've got to live some of the romance I've imagined. I'm going to do it—I'm going to do it."

"So you terrorise a couple of women! Well, thank God you're terrorised by a couple of men."

Day after day went by, and there was no hint of action by the shyster and no sign of the Spaniard. Even Jed, I think, grew a bit calmer. I must concede that even in his greatest panic there was no indication of it when he was with Mr. Sidney. A curious composition of character was in this man. I think his code of morals was complete in an idea of service to his employer.

His attendance upon Mr. Sidney was exacting, and a strain upon his strength and nerves. The most cheerful sick-room—and Mr. Sidney's was cordial—is a test of endurance of the people who have to live their lives there.

Jed needed diversion, but he was afraid to take

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it, even in the formal garden or in the immediate vicinity of the house. He evidently felt the security of the walls and feared to leave it. This wore on him.

"I'm not sleeping well, Doctor," he said.

"What I ought to do," I replied, "is to prescribe some drugs which would enslave you and make you sleep very well, very long, very soon."

"But you won't," he said with a smile, "because you've got a conscience and it would bother you; and that's why I like and trust you."

"Thank you for nothing," I said, "but what you need is more air and diversion."

"I don't dare go out. I don't know what they are up to. It's this dreadful suspense."

"I'll go out with you," I said. "We can take a car for an hour's drive. It will rest you and relieve the tension."

"We both can go armed," he suggested eagerly.

Why did I care whether this fellow was physically well or ill? There is something in a physician which leads him to disregard the moral character of persons physically in need of care. It's their bodies, not their souls or minds, that concern us. Men to their trade! Nevertheless I strove for a bargain with him.

"I am engaged to Miss Sidney, Jed," I said. "You have some means of terrifying her mother. Because you have that power, two men have the

means of terrifying you. If I had my way, you would be kicked out of the place. If I am to help you, I have to be paid. Treat Mrs. Sidney with consideration."

"I have every consideration for Mrs. Sidney," he said. "You don't understand at all. All the scruples I use are wasted. I might as well be a brute. I was a poor man. I have come into the possession of a competence. I am not abusing it—merely using it."

"You have tried to terrify Mrs. Sidney into consenting that you terrify Miss Sidney into marriage with you."

"You say you are engaged to Miss Sidney," he replied, "and yet you do not understand a man's being desperately unjust in order to have her as his wife. Engaged, you said—not that you loved her. If you had, I'd have laughed at you."

I did not reply. What desperate thing might I not do, were Isobel the reward!

CHAPTER XXVIII

WE had seen nothing of Dravada or the lawyer for nearly three weeks. I was unable to think that we had heard the last of them. Dravada's purpose had been too long nourished and the lawyer's cupidity was too great for either to abandon his intent. Jed's disposition was resilient, and soon he recovered his poise. He thought his enemies had abandoned their intent.

It was a relief to me when going to bed and lying a few minutes awake, to hear the rush and scurry of the dogs about the place. They were active at night. Rabbits, coons, weasels and occasionally a fox kept them moving.

Jed's courage returned—and with it, I was disturbed to observe, a threat of another fit of temper. It showed itself first in moodiness and then in insolence. I was glad to find that Jed in this mood this time was not directing himself against Mrs. Sidney. He had turned against me. I knew that he was in torment again. He had nothing to say to me unless he saw me in Mr. Sidney's room. Then he was pleasant.

"Jed," I said to him one morning, "I know you

better than you think I do. You'll torment yourself until you do something you'll regret."

"Go to the devil," said Jed.

Isobel and I had been progressing as rationally as two young people could, situated with regard to each other as we were. She pestered me but frequently was kind.

She knew I enjoyed a sensuous mood if I could hear the piano when I was unoccupied and relaxing, and it was a part of her unobtrusive kindness that if I were sitting in the library of an evening, just before dinner, she would go into the music-room across the hall and play for a half-hour as if to amuse herself.

One evening I had been reading and Isobel had gone to the piano. I had put my book down on my knees as she began to play. Then I was aroused by perceiving, without seeing, that something was near me.

I turned suddenly and saw Jed. He was not three feet behind my chair. His face revealed disorder of mind.

"Do you want a cocktail?" he asked.

"No," I said.

Isobel touched the keys of the piano, as a player done with a mood may do to express surfeit or conclusion.

"Not a mild one?" Jed asked, persisting.

"Well, then, very weak," I said.

I took up my book again and forced myself, as discipline, to read. I had not been able to do it so long as Isobel played, but now that she had stopped I might at least try.

I made an effort. I tried to keep my attention on the type. It was no use. After fifteen minutes' reading I found that I had not turned a page. Neither had Jed brought the cocktail. I was restless and disgusted with myself. I got up and walked about the library. I went to the front entrance to find if a few deep breaths in the open would not produce tranquillity.

As I stood at the entrance Isobel came running toward it. I heard her before I saw her. She was running and gasping. She came up the steps, saw me, controlled herself and tried to appear undisturbed. She might have succeeded, but a sleeve of her gown was torn from her waist and had fallen to her wrist.

"What has happened to you?" I asked.

"Nothing," she said.

"You were running."

"A little exercise."

"Look at your sleeve," I said.

She clutched at it as if she had become conscious of it for the first time, and then ran by me and indoors.

We met at dinner twenty minutes later. Isobel had on another gown. Jed did not serve us.

Dinner was delayed ten minutes. Then two maids undertook the service. Mrs. Sidney asked for Jed. One of the maids said that he had not appeared and they were doing the best they could without him.

"Why, what can have happened to Jed?" Mrs. Sidney exclaimed.

"What did happen to Jed?" I asked Isobel after dinner when we were alone.

"I don't know," she said.

"Who tore your sleeve?"

"Jed," she said with resolute frankness.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Where were you when he did it?"

"At the edge of the woods. I had gone out for a bit of air—just across the lawn. Jed appeared."

"What did he say?"

"I don't know—something incoherent, violent; and he took me by the sleeve. I was not frightened, but I drew back suddenly. My sleeve ripped out. We were at the edge of the woods. Three men appeared, strangled Jed before he could cry out, picked him up and carried him off."

I spent the evening with Mr. Sidney and told him that Jed was ill. He was concerned, and I made the lie a kindly one.

"It is insignificant," I said. "With his habits he must occasionally pay a price. A touch of indigestion this time."

"How old is Jed?" Mr. Sidney asked. "How old do you suppose? About fifty?"

"Possibly," I said.

"He has had an undecorated life," Mr. Sidney said. "I have thought a good deal about him. Our habits are not good for the health, are they, Doctor?"

"Jed's are not."

"He will die some years earlier than his rational prospect because he sits with me in the evening and drinks one or two bottles of wine?"

"I am sure he will."

"His prospect is decreased five or ten years?"

"At least ten."

"He is living three days every twenty-four hours. He had been living a long while without being alive at all, before he came to us. I have no compunctions with regard to Jed. Ten more years add nothing to the value of a cabbage. I like rather to see a hyacinth forced to bloom in December and perfume a winter."

CHAPTER XXIX

TO extemporise a few lies to get through the night was easy enough; but Jed was not back in the morning, and Mr. Sidney had to be deceived in more enduring fashion.

I explained to him that Jed had been called away on an urgent matter, which seemed to Mrs. Sidney to justify his going at once. Mrs. Sidney, at my request, made the same explanation later, and Mr. Sidney accepted it. This explanation seemed very lame to me, but it served. Mr. Sidney did not know of any reason why Jed should disappear. We offered him an explanation of the servant's absence, and he accepted it.

It was apparent that the Spaniard and the lawyer had been two of the men concerned in Jed's plight, and I thought it best to telephone a discreet detective agency and have the lawyer put under scrutiny. Mrs. Sidney thought this was a proper course—or at least that no better one was available. I told the superintendent of the agency we had reason for the belief that Brown, the lawyer, was responsible or involved in responsibility for the disappearance of the servant, and that although we did not wish the inquiry to extend into motives,

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we had reason also to believe that he could be brought out to Hartley House without much difficulty.

Two days later the detectives reported that the lawyer had disappeared from all his accustomed places and that it might require some time to get trace of him.

Jed had been gone four days when one of the maids asked for a month's leave. Her mother was very sick, she said. Mrs. Sidney agreed willingly, although disliking to have an unfamiliar servant in the house to fill this maid's place for the time she would be gone. Anna, the maid, said that a very close friend of hers would be glad of an opportunity to have a month in the country. Mrs. Sidney took Anna's recommendation with some relief.

The day Anna went away a very pretty girl was met at the train by the chauffeur. She was the thirty-day maid. I saw her as she came in. I thought her manner did not indicate domestic service, but afterward I found that in spite of appearance she was very deft and competent. With Jed gone, such of his duties as could be done by the maids were given them; and this new servant, Agnes, was so efficient in the dining-room that she took over what Jed had done there.

Mr. Sidney liked attractive women about him, and Agnes pleased him with her bright, pretty appearance and good-humoured serviceability. In

three or four days he was glad to have her assigned to duties which Jed had done for him. In little over a week Agnes had fitted into the routine of the house perfectly.

Up to this time nothing had been heard of Jed, but on the ninth day of his disappearance the detectives telephoned that they had the lawyer. McGuire was the detective-superintendent's name.

"I am not to understand what is back of this case," he suggested, telephoning.

"It is not necessary," I said. "If he is willing to come here in your custody, that is enough. I think he will be, if you give him to understand that it may be the short way out of a great deal of difficulty."

The next day McGuire, the detective, came with the lawyer, who apparently was trying to keep from looking as frightened as he felt.

"I'll have you understand I came of my own volition," he said.

"With Mr. McGuire representing your volition," I suggested.

"Do you care to have him know the nature of the business that has come up between us?"

"If you do, I am willing," I said. "I do not know any law, but I am sure you are near the penitentiary on two charges."

"I think I'll look about the grounds for a while," said McGuire.

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"I'll be glad to show you around in about five minutes," I said.

"I'll just take a look," he replied. "That will be enough, and I'll be back in five minutes."

"What do you expect to gain by this?" the lawyer asked when the detective had gone.

"What did you fear to lose by not coming?" I asked. "Suppose we make our dealing plain. You were one of a party of three that abducted the servant Jed. We want him released and returned here where he is needed."

"You are talking nonsense," said the lawyer. "I came with your detective because I thought that at last this household was prepared to deal reasonably with a reasonable man."

"You thought so because you thought the household had been terrorised by the disappearance of Jed. It has not been. We intend that Jed shall not come to any harm if it can be prevented by us, and we want him returned here where he is needed."

"I am astonished that you should have wasted my time in such a preposterous supposition," said the lawyer. "I have only one matter to take up with this family. You know what that is. We are wasting time—I have wasted too much already."

"Where is Jed?" I asked.

"That's none of my business."

"It will be made yours."

"Barking dogs—moonshine—things to scare babies," said the little man.

McGuire came back.

"I guess I've seen all I want of the grounds," he said, "and there's a train back in half an hour. We've our rig waiting."

"I'm not going back," said the lawyer. "I stay at Hartley."

"What is he to do?" asked McGuire.

"Merely leave the house," I said, and I rang for a maid.

"I'll not be bulldozed," said the lawyer.

"You are not being," I suggested. "The maid will show you out."

He was at a loss but had nothing else to do but go when the maid came. I held McGuire for only a moment and asked him to have operatives watch the lawyer constantly, with an idea that he actually would remain in Hartley, and to continue to search for Jed.

Mr. Sidney, Isobel and I had a cheerful dinner that evening. Worried as Mrs. Sidney was by Jed's disappearance, she was relieved by his absence. I had a pleasant two hours with Mr. Sidney, and after that the night produced an occurrence.



CHAPTER XXX

EVER since Jed had disappeared I had been accustomed to taking certain responsibilities with regard to the house. The element of security entered as a question. I knew we were in circumstances which demanded—at least asked—precautions. I went about the house at night to see to locks, in a supervision of the duties the servants performed in closing the place—one I took on myself without saying anything about it.

Hartley House was large, with many wings. It was nearly a half-hour's work to visit all the entrances and see to bolts. Many of the halls and corridors were dark, and I carried an electric flash to use when needed.

I did not say anything of my assumed duties, but I suggested to Mrs. Sidney that, considering the state of the house, it would be wise to tell the household that all doors would be locked at ten o'clock. Mrs. Sidney thought this good policy and the servants were so informed.

I made my rounds about midnight, passing the night until then with Mr. Sidney in a poor effort to substitute for the wine-drinking Jed. The night which had our new phenomenon as a development I started through the house at midnight. I

had gone from Mr. Sidney's room to my own, had put on a smoking-jacket and slippers, put my revolver in my pocket and had laid my watch on the dresser.

I went downstairs and examined the bolt, lock, and chains on the doors at the main entrance. In the halls leading from these doors there were electric buttons, and the house being presumably closed for the night and darkened, I went from hall to hall, from door to door, lighting my way by pushing the buttons and turning off the lights when I had satisfied myself. In two wings, one to the north and one to the south, there was no electric wiring. In the halls of these wings I went along easily enough with an occasional flash of the little light I carried.

Jed's room was in the south wing on the second floor. The windows of the hall toward the east showed the waning moon just rising above a grove of oak mixed with larch, and I stopped at one of the windows to admire the quiet scene and consider my own condition. I suppose a young man, even a stick of a man, knowing Isobel and seeing a moon coming up over a massed grove of oak mixed with larch, must have given a moment's attention to himself.

Before I could become as pensive as I certainly should have, uninterrupted, I was attracted—not startled but turned—by a noise at the farther end

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of the hall. At that end of the hall were the stairs to the second floor, where Jed had his room. There were no windows at that end, and it was in complete darkness, although three faint rays of moonlight traversed the hall from the windows nearer me.

I listened, and it seemed that the sound I heard was the creaking of old stairs under a light and stealthy step. That interested me, and I went as quietly as I could toward the sound. I must have made some noise. The creaking stopped. I stood still—in one of the shafts of moonlight. There was an instant of silence. I took another step toward the stair and hit my foot against a chair, almost losing my balance.

There was a scurry of feet and a rustling of skirts from the bottom of the stairs across the dark hall. I flashed my electric light, and within its rays saw a glint of white which instantly disappeared down a side corridor which led to a small door used by servants. I started in pursuit, but a blow on the head, sharp but not powerful, coming from behind, knocked me down.

It dazed me a bit and felled me, but was not enough to make me unconscious. Nevertheless I got to my feet unsteadily and made my way slowly down the corridor into which the flash of white had turned. I came to the door with my electric light illuminating the hall, and thus I knew no one was

in it—it had no recesses or furniture to offer concealment—and found the door locked from the outside.

By this time I had my senses fully recovered. I ran to the nearest window and was just in time to see two figures, one in white, the other indistinct, at the far edge of the lawn, running. They ran into the woods, and while I stood at the window, trying with a painful consciousness of stupidity and ineptitude to decide upon a course of action, I heard an automobile-engine start in the lane beyond the woods.

CHAPTER XXXI

OUT of a stupor, in which I watched the two strange figures go from the moonlight on the lawn into the dark of the oak grove, I was aroused—possibly by the sound of the engine of the automobile—with a course of action suggested.

It came of fears long entertained, now present with a threat of imminent consequence. I ran for the stairs, flashing the light, up the stairs and to Jed's room.

His door was open. As I have said, this wing was not wired for electricity. I turned my light about the room, saw that the fear which had caused me to patrol the house was realised and then hunted for the lamp, which I found and lighted.

Jed's room was in the disorder in which a hard-working housebreaker, intent on finding jewels he knew the room contained, might have left it. It seemed almost ripped to pieces.

On a table was a small pearl-inlaid ebony box. The lid was open; the box was empty.

As I stood in the midst of the disarray of the room, with the empty box the most significant thing in it, the marvelous unreality of Hartley House, a smiling dread, seemed to have visible token.

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The empty box, I thought, had contained the manuscript which recorded Mr. Sidney's secret. The flash of white which I had seen in the hall indicated the method by which it had disappeared. The two figures crossing the lawn in the moonlight were further indication. There was the sound of the automobile-engine. I had a sore spot on my head. The manuscript, I knew—or believed—had been in the box which stood with significant emptiness in the midst of the disordered room of Jed, who had been kidnapped. If my surmises were correct, Mr. Sidney's secret, upon which I knew the happiness of the family depended, was in the hands of men designing to make use of it.

In a helpless fashion I tried to think of something to do, quickly and vigorously—a demand upon faculties which I did not possess.

Jed, being a major domo about the place, had in his room a telephone connecting with the various servants' quarters. I used it to arouse the chauffeur. It took five minutes of ringing his bell to awaken him; when he responded, I told him that the house had been robbed by a man and a woman dressed in white, who had escaped, under my sight, through the oak grove and had used an automobile waiting for them on the road beyond the grove. I told him to awaken one of the gardeners, take weapons and go as quickly as possible south by the best roads.

When this had been done, I called Mrs. Sidney's maid and told her to awaken Mrs. Sidney and tell her, if possible without alarming her, that I wished to speak to her on an urgent matter.

There was nothing else to do, or if there were, I could not think of it. In a few minutes the maid came back and said that Mrs. Sidney could see me. I found her in the sitting-room of her suite.

She was composed and prepared for any news; I could see that. An interruption of her sleep by me could signify almost any disaster in her life—the sudden death of Mr. Sidney, new danger from Jed, a dangerous illness contracted by Isobel, a close threat of the exposure of Mr. Sidney—almost any occurrence which would be terrible to her. By looking at her as she sat by the fire, I could see—it was the first time I had appreciated it fully—how this lady would meet her grand fate. When disaster came it would cause no terrors. In anticipation of it she might wince, but not in meeting it.

As I entered her room, I tried to smile in a friendly fashion which would more quickly carry reassurance than my slow words could. Evidently that awkward smile, well intended and clumsily put on, did what I wanted it to do. I could see the relaxation of muscles which had been tense.

"It is nothing serious, Mrs. Sidney," I said, "—nothing that we need now regard as serious; and it does not concern Mr. Sidney's health. There

has been an intruder in the house. Moreover, the purpose was to break into Jed's room, and Jed's room has been broken into. I got a glimpse of the person who did it, a woman. I saw a man and a woman run into the oak grove and heard an automobile-engine start on the road. I have sent a chauffeur and a gardener in chase, but they are travelling against so great a start that I have no hope. What I fear is that they have Mr. Sidney's diary. Do you know where Jed kept it?"

"No, Doctor," said Mrs. Sidney. "If there had been any chance of finding it, we should have taken it away from him. In his absence we have searched his room frequently."

"These people are after the manuscript, and they are satisfied that they have it," I said. "I am sure of that. There was a small pearl-inlaid box, open and empty, in the middle of the floor."

"We never found such a box," said Mrs. Sidney.

"Then it might have been in there?"

"It might."

"If it was, they have it and we must get it back."

"Oh, if we can, we must!" she cried, holding her hands so tightly clasped that the delicate bones made a crackling noise.

I tried to be encouraging and consoling and as a practical measure, gave her a bromide.

CHAPTER XXXII

HARTLEY HOUSE had a general office where the business of the estate was handled. It was to one side of the main entrance.

I had promised to be an extraordinary person in meeting extraordinary circumstance, but all I did was to go to the office and, lighting the lights, sit there. I was in the extreme dejection of a weakling when the door opened and Isobel came in.

"What are you doing up?" I asked.

"I'll ask the same thing of you. What are you and the whole household doing, awake and moving?"

"I did not know the whole household was stirring," I said.

"It is, and I was awakened. I did not want to arouse Mother if she was sleeping, but I did want to know what had set the whole place in motion at this hour of the night."

I told her that housebreakers had been surprised at work and had escaped.

"If you have been disturbed," I suggested, "probably your father has also. You had better go to his room and tell him that the servants have been flustered by a burglar-scare, and then you had

better go to your mother's room and stay with her until things quiet down."

That seemed sound enough advice, but when Isobel had gone I was left wondering again what to do next. It was out of the question to notify the authorities. The thieves had stolen something which, from what I knew of it, I preferred to have in their hands rather than in the possession of the police.

Our detective agency I could trust, but I did not want to communicate with any one but McGuire, the superintendent, and there was no need of telephoning him until later in the morning.

The case, as I thought it over, came to this: The Spaniard and the attorney, by the aid of a confederate, a woman, had obtained possession of the diary containing the secret of Hartley House. They would soon be heard from. Their plan was to bleed the family and to continue to bleed it as long as the suppression of the secret remained important, which would be during Mr. Sidney's life, if not longer. Mrs. Sidney might be so involved that it would be necessary, afterward, to shield her. It might even be that Isobel would be forced to protect her father's name and her mother's name, out of respect for their memory, if not out of consideration for herself.

It was evident that the thieves would remain in touch with Hartley House. They would not dis-

appear. We did not have to pursue them. They would pursue us.

There was the possibility of dealing with them by force extra-legally. Anything we did for our protection had to be done extra-legally. I thought McGuire could and would attend to that, and I intended to instruct him to consider murder the only process not to be thought of.

I tried to reconcile my ideas of Mr. Sidney's character with the facts of the family's terrible dilemma. What could a man of so just and honourable, kindly and charming a nature—as revealed in his old age—have done, even in a hot and passionate youth, which he could not face now? What crime could he have committed which not only constituted a danger to his security but remained a source of satisfaction to him?

If his disposition had been different, the case would have been understood. Mr. Sidney's nature, if it admitted the possibility of his committing a crime, certainly demanded the acceptance of full responsibility. He would have acknowledged himself the author of the crime; he would take the consequences—he had that nobility. Nothing that I knew of Mr. Sidney could be reconciled to the strange circumstances of Hartley House.

For two hours, I sat by the telephone, expecting momentarily to hear from the chauffeur who had gone in pursuit of the thieves. It was about four

o'clock in the morning—there was a pale suggestion of light in the windows—when Mrs. Aldrich, the housekeeper, came to the office. She was an imperturbable lady of disciplinary habit and ordinarily unruffled dignity, but now she was disturbed.

“Doctor,” she said, “Agnes, the new maid, cannot be found. She is not in her room. Her bed has not been touched. Most of her belongings and her suit-case are gone. Her trunk is in her room, but it contains nothing of any value—only a few aprons, a white muslin dress and a pair of soft slippers. I came to you with this probably unimportant domestic incident, thinking that—well, the occurrence of the night might have some connection with this girl.”

“How did Agnes usually dress, Mrs. Aldrich?” I asked.

“The dress is prescribed while on duty; it is black. Agnes, I observed, when not engaged wore white.”

“I think Agnes probably was involved in the matter,” I said.

“We have always so dreaded to take a new servant,” said Mrs. Aldrich, “but Agnes came recommended for the month by a very faithful girl who wanted a month’s leave. Has anything of great value been taken?”

“Nothing of any intrinsic value whatever, Mrs.

Aldrich. I imagine the robbers were alarmed before they found any jewels or plate."

"That's a consolation, in any event," said the housekeeper; "but we never shall be able to take in a new servant again with any ease of mind."

The chauffeur telephoned as Mrs. Aldrich went away. The chase in the night had been useless, as might be expected, and I told him to return home.

It was full day by this time, and I called McGuire of the detective agency at his home. I told him I was as certain as a person could be in the circumstances that the man running with the woman across the lawn in the moonlight was the shyster lawyer, and the woman was a maid who had found a month's employment in the house.

Mrs. Aldrich brought me a light breakfast, and one of the gardeners came to say that the dogs had been found in the woods. They had been fed drugged meat and were sick and even now barely able to stand.

I was preparing to go to Mr. Sidney's room when the telephone rang again. It was a call from the village of Horwich, forty miles east, a place of some repute, or ill repute, for the number and character of its drinking-places and road-houses. It was off main-travelled roads but was much frequented by people who wanted the kind of entertainment to be found there.

The man calling me said he was the constable of

the township of Horwich and asked if he were talking to a person of responsibility. I assured him he was. Then he told me that an automobile accident had occurred two miles out of Horwich and that the only identifying marks suggested Hartley House as a place to make inquiries. He asked if I could come to Horwich.

I endeavoured to question him over the telephone, but he said there was little information he could give, a man and a woman in a car—man past middle life, a young woman in white; the man was dead, the woman badly injured.

"I'll be over as soon as possible," I said.
"Please keep the effects all together."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THERE was no doubt in my mind that the quavering little rascal of a lawyer with his precise ways and timid but controlling unscrupulousness had come to the end of his road—and at the very moment when he had success in his hand. There was no reason to doubt that the woman was the maid Agnes whom I had surprised at midnight stealing down the stairs from Jed's room with Mr. Sidney's diary.

But if we were rid of the timorous, grasping little attorney, we were in worse difficulties. With the attorney and his Spanish client, we at least knew the manner of dealing. It was disconcerting—I might almost be forgiven the exaggeration of saying it was horrifying—to consider that the diary was being handled by a constable, a sheriff or a coroner or even by any idler or resort-keeper in the village of Horwich.

If the automobile accident had disposed of one ingenious enemy only to make a half-dozen equally unscrupulous ones, or to apprise (I was tempted to think this was worse) one incorruptible officer of the condition of Hartley House—in either event, we were the worse for the change in circumstance.

I went to see Mr. Sidney, who had not been disturbed in the night. When Isobel had gone to him with the explanations that the disorder in the house was caused by a trivial burglar-scare, she had awakened him, but he was jocular on the subject of feminine panics and demanded the privilege of his sleep.

When I came to him, he wanted to know if I had shared the petticoat confusion of the night. I said that I had, and that although the affair was not serious, it was unpleasant to have the house broken into and it was necessary to act in the matter, a duty which seemed to come naturally to me. For that reason, I explained, I might be gone a large part of the day.

"A sense of duty, Doctor," said Mr. Sidney, laughing, "can be a virtue or a vice. I think probably it is most the latter when it seems most the former. It is a form of egotistic gratification."

I thought he would not be so easy if he knew what the thieves had carried away, but it was only natural that a man of his experience and contemplative mood should be unimpressed by the fact that Hartley had had a visit from housebreakers.

One of the stablemen knew how to drive a car, and I asked him to bring out the automobile which I used when I went to town. The chauffeur, when he returned, would have been up most of the night. I did not want to impose on him. I might be gone

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most of the day. In a half-hour we were away toward Horwich. I never had been over the road, which ran by old farms with stone fences and was little travelled except by the people who lived along it.

Horwich itself was a combination of respectable antiquity and modern profligacy. The old houses, with their great lawns and ancient trees, were odd companions to the road-houses which had been built to cater to the wants of automobilists who must have as their objective a place to get drunk. Originally the place had a respectable tavern. It was called the White Owl. It was still respectable, but oddly enough, it was the success of the White Owl which had attracted the other places.

I inquired for the constable and was told that I should likely find him at the White Owl, he being a frequenter of that place and now having a case which needed a great deal of drinking and talking over.

I went to the White Owl and on entering the bar-room, which really had an attractive rather than a disreputable appearance, saw a group of men about a short, broad, square-shouldered fellow who was talking to the interest of half a dozen or more fellows.

My entrance made no diversion, and judging, from what I had been told, that the squat, talkative fellow was the constable and that he was telling

the story I wanted to know, I decided to remain unidentified, have a bottle of beer—from the bartender, who came half-heartedly from the constable's narration—and thus as an eavesdropper get what I came to get in direct conversation.

I had my bottle of beer, and the bartender went back to the group, dominated by the squat, talkative fellow.

CHAPTER XXXIV

HE was not the comic type of constable. He showed intelligence and decision, but evidently he was fond of a story when he had it to tell. He was saying:

"I was up late because there was a bad set at the Half Day, and Bill Dailey thought he might have trouble with them before he got them on their way. About one o'clock they had a quarrel, without anything but talk, divided into two sets and went away in two cars toward the city. Bill said: 'Some that looks the worse don't make half the trouble you get unexpected from quiet-looking ones.' I said that sometimes was so, and we talked for a half-hour.

"Then Bill said there evidently wasn't going to be any more business to-night and sent the bartenders and waiters home. They closed everything but the bar. Bill and I split a bottle of beer, and Bill said he'd be going himself. It was nearly one-thirty then, and I thought I'd wait up for Number Eleven at two o'clock and see if any one got off.

"Bill gave me the keys and told me to shut the place up. I had another bottle of beer and was

playing solitaire on the bar when Number Eleven stopped.

"I went to the front door of the bar and looked over toward the station. A man had got off, and he was headed toward the Half Day, which was the only place showing a light. I waited in the doorway, and when he came up, I saw he was a foreigner. He had gold rings in his ears.

"He made as if he wanted to come in. He didn't speak enough English for me to make out what he was saying. I let him in, and he went up to the bar, put down a quarter and pointed toward the whisky. I gave him the bottle, and he pointed to me and smiled. So I said I didn't mind if I did, and we had a drink together."

"Did you remember to ring up the quarter, Angus?" asked one of the audience.

"Never you mind," said the constable. "Maybe I took my pay as bartender. I thought I'd like to know what this fellow wanted in town, so I didn't suggest it was closing time.

"Then I was surprised to hear a car coming along. The other fellow seemed to be expecting it. We both went to the door and watched the headlight coming down the road. The car stopped at the door, and a man helped a woman out. He was a little old shrivelled fellow. She was young and pretty.

"The old fellow said something to my foreigner,

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and he threw his arms in the air, wriggled all over, laughed and fell on the old fellow and kissed him. The old boy struggled and kicked, but the foreigner just picked him right up and kissed him on both cheeks.

"That old boy was mad when he got loose. The foreigner let go of him and tried to kiss the girl, but she laughed and got behind me.

" 'Not me!' she said. 'Give it to the bartender.'

" 'If he does, I'll brain him,' I said.

"The foreigner let out a whoop. The old boy was all ruffled up. He was scrubbing his cheeks with his handkerchief.

" 'This is unthinkable,' he said. 'It is beyond expression. You human pig! Dog of a man—slobbering beast!' Then he stopped speaking English and said a lot of things the foreigner understood, but it didn't make him mad. His eyes just sparkled. He put a dollar on the bar and pointed to the whisky again.

" 'Bring our drinks over here,' said the old boy, pointing to one of the tables in a far corner of the room.

" 'It's past closing time here,' I said.

" 'I thought this place was open all night,' he said. 'I was informed it was.'

"I wanted to know what the whole business was about, so I told him that we kept open accord-

ing to the trade and that I was willing to serve them. They sat down, and the two men talked. The girl didn't seem to have the language. The foreigner was excited. The old boy kept wiping his eyeglasses. He wasn't showing as much nervousness as the foreigner, but he was pleased over something.

"I kept behind the bar, as near their table as I could, and pretended to play solitaire and wait for their orders, watching them as much as possible and trying to make out what they were talking about. Pretty soon they wanted another round of drinks. When I served them the old boy wanted to know if he could telephone to the city. He paid me the toll, and I showed him the telephone-booth and heard him give his number. It was River 4600.

"When he got his party, he said: 'Is that you, Sim? Everything is all right. Yes, as expected. Let him go.'

"That was all. He went back to the table. I noticed that he kept tight hold all the time on a leather case. When they got to talking again, the foreigner kept pointing toward the case and began to get more excited. As near as I could make out what was happening, as they kept on talking and motioning, it was the black leather case the foreigner wanted, and the other man wouldn't let him have it.

"Finally the old boy got up with the case held

tight under his arm and went toward the door with the girl, and the foreigner following him, and the foreigner talking fast and loud. They got outside and all got into the car, the girl beside the old boy, who was driving, and the foreigner behind.

"As the old boy started the car, the foreigner made a grab for the case, but the old boy was too quick for him and dropped it to the floor. The car swerved toward the ditch.

" 'You can't drive a car that way,' I said. 'You'd better tell that fellow to lay off.'

" 'I've told him,' said the old boy. 'If he keeps on bothering me, I'll tell him with a gun. He'll kill all of us.'

"So they started, but they hadn't gone a quarter of a mile when I heard the girl scream. I got my motor-cycle, which was out in front, and went down the road after them. There was sure going to be an accident if the foreigner kept grabbing at the man at the wheel. They must have been going pretty fast. I chased them a mile and a half, and several times I heard the girl cry out ahead in the dark.

"I was within two hundred yards of them when the girl screamed louder than ever, and I heard a crash. I knew they'd get it, and they had. The car had gone into a tree at the side of the road.

"The old boy was dead, and the girl was unconscious—but the foreigner was gone."

"What about the leather case?" asked a man in the group about the constable. It was the question I could have shouted out myself.

"It was gone too. The old boy did not have a single paper in his pockets, but after I got help and we got attention for the girl, we found a letter in her purse addressed to Miss Agnes Mitchell, Hartley House, Hartley. That was the only identification we had. I telephoned over to Hartley and a man said he would be over. That's all I know about it."

"This is getting to be a hell of a burg," said one of the men.

"Alcohol and gasoline won't mix," said another.

"But what about the leather case?" said a third.
"It wasn't the booze that did it."

I feared I was in for considerable village criticism and interpretation, with comments on life generally, before I could get at the constable without revealing myself to the whole interested group, an event which would have been pleasing to the villagers but unwelcome to me. I was saved that.

"You know all I know," said the constable.
"I've got to be getting over to the station. It's about time that man from Hartley was looking me up."

As he went out, I followed him, and on the sidewalk I introduced myself.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE constable looked at me for an instant as if uncertain whether to regard my manner of getting his narrative as altogether friendly.

"You were telling what I wanted to know," I suggested. "I came in because I was directed to inquire for you there. I did not care to make my identity known to the people in the room. I thought we should have more listeners than our business needed. I did not interrupt you, but it was without intent of gaining information that I did not expect to gain otherwise."

"It's all right," said the constable. "You see through me, though. I was just thinking how uncomfortable I ought to have been with you listening, and I was pretty near getting sore. The first thing is the identification of the body. For the time being, it is in the station-house."

There was no possible doubt, even before I looked at the face, from which the constable drew the sheet which covered the body as it lay on a bench. The shabby little lawyer's rascally schemes, timid but villainous—necessary, probably, in his gnarled and unhappy life—were closed by death.

A deputy of the coroner was present, and he took

a deposition by me which gave merely the dead man's name, stated that he had called several times at Hartley House on business and that I had no personal knowledge of the manner in which he came to his death.

That was all the authorities needed of me. A maid by the name of Agnes Mitchell had been given temporary employment at Hartley House. It was undoubtedly she who was the companion of the man who had been killed.

"They never get too old," said the deputy.

That explanation satisfied his comfortably sophisticated view of life. The man was past middle life; the girl was pretty—an automobile, a road-house, some drinks, a smash-up. They wrote this story into the coroner's records day after day; it was a formula. The deputy could not understand the presence of the foreigner or the significance of the leather case. The ordinary story sometimes had variants. He was sure of his essentials. The decoration did not matter.

I asked the constable where I might see the maid and whether she was too badly injured to talk to any one. He said that she had been taken to the nearest hospital, which was ten miles away. He did not know how serious her injuries were. I had my driver take me to the hospital and found that as a representative of the family for which she was employed I might talk to her.

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She was in pain and was heavily bandaged, but was conscious and willing to talk.

"Agnes," I said when the nurse had left us, "I do not want to increase your discomfort, but I must have some matters out with you. I have not told the authorities what I know of your case. There is no charge of housebreaking or thievery against you. You may not know that I surprised you on the stairs last night."

"I knew it was you," she said.

"Now, I am not here to make a great deal of trouble for you, but if I show leniency it will be in exchange for your confidence. We have known that an unconscionable gang of rascals have had designs on Hartley House. Evidently you have yielded to some temptation they offered you. Deal with me frankly, and I'll be more than lenient."

She told me that the lawyer had tried to corrupt the maid, Anna, who had asked, later, for a month's leave. She found that she did not have the courage for the work. The lawyer evolved the plan of introducing a resolute and reliable woman into the house by the expedient adopted. Her instructions were to find and take away a manuscript she would find concealed in Jed's room. The abduction of Jed had made it easy for the maid to search through his belongings. Agnes did not know what value was attached to the manuscript. It was her obligation merely to get it.

She knew of my nightly rounds and planned to avoid them. She had spent several nights hunting through Jed's belongings without success. The lawyer was getting impatient. She wanted to have the business done and get her fee, which was to be a large one. The nervous insistence of the attorney for the despatch of the matter, and the girl's desire to get away, led to a determination to have done this particular night if the article could be obtained.

The lawyer was to have an automobile waiting on the road beyond the oak grove. He was to be by the small door, through which the maid escaped. She ransacked Jed's room in the fashion of which I saw the result, and found the box cunningly hidden in his bed-springs in a manner so contrived that except to careful investigation it seemed to be a part of the structure of the bed.

Agnes said that she had planned to make her escape after my round of the house, but her excitement at finding the thing so earnestly sought betrayed her into incautiousness.

The lawyer's plan was to take the road we would think them less likely to take in case there were pursuit, and for that reason had gone toward Horwich. The Spaniard was not expected to meet them, but he knew they intended to go through Horwich, and he knew approximately the time they would get there if they were successful. The train

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which stopped at Horwich to let off passengers allowed him to act upon a plan which his suspicions of his lawyer's good faith suggested. He thought that if the lawyer saw a barroom light he would stop for a drink.

He was in Horwich unexpectedly to meet the girl and the lawyer. The scene in the Half Day barroom followed. The Spaniard was determined to have possession of the manuscript. The lawyer was determined he should not have it. They struggled as the lawyer tried to drive the car, having several narrow escapes from the ditch.

Then the Spaniard, in a rage, abandoned all caution and threw himself bodily on the lawyer, who lost control of the car and hit a tree. That was all the girl knew.

"We were anxious, Agnes," I said, "to learn the reason for this extraordinary attack upon Jed, and for the theft of the manuscript. Did they tell you what they expected to find?"

"No," said the girl. "I was just to get the manuscript."

"Did you read it?"

"No, I knew it must be the one."

I thought a while, trying to make up my mind what further to do with the girl. Finally I said:

"Agnes, I am inclined to compromise with the law. You are guilty of a theft, a very strange

one which you do not understand and which we want to understand. I will prefer no charges against you now, and without forecasting the future, I may intimate that no charges ever will be preferred against you if I may have you removed to Hartley House, where you will have every care, but where you must remain under a sure but unobtrusive surveillance until we give you permission to go. In this I am not unmoved by considerations of your youth and your future, which make this crime more deplorable."

In spite of her pain the girl smiled.

"You would amuse the police," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Why do you suppose the lawyer hired me for this job?"

"Because you were available, suitable and easily tempted."

"Because I am a thief and know the business and have a record."

That was a facer, but it did not change the present need.

"You have less reason, then, for wanting to come to the attention of the police again."

"I have no reason at all."

"Then you will come to Hartley House as I suggested?"

"Sure, if you can get me there without killing me."

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I made the necessary arrangements, and Agnes set out on her return in an ambulance.

The servant who opened the door as we drove up was Jed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

JED made a point of imperturbability and appeared in the doorway in his most serviceable mood, with the manner which was the utmost provocation at times to persons who knew him to be more nearly master than servant in the house.

I could not help showing, by a start and by the expression on my face, that I was astonished by his reappearance. This pleased him. When he acted, he liked to produce effects. He looked inquiringly at the ambulance and then inquiringly at me. By that time I was able to accept him as a usual part of the household.

"Get some one to help you with a stretcher, Jed," I said. "Agnes, a maid, has been hurt. Then tell Mrs. Aldrich I should like to see her in the office as soon as it is convenient."

"Yes, sir," said Jed.

Mrs. Aldrich came immediately, and I told her that the girl Agnes was to be treated with every consideration and that if it were possible to have the other maids regard her kindly so as not to make her feel obloquy, it would be only Christian.

Mrs. Aldrich was a very stanch churchwoman,

and I could see in the tightening of her lips that such soft treatment of a woman caught in crime did not satisfy her ideas of morality. However, she said nothing in protest, and I hastened to do what I could for her scruples.

"We do not understand this case at all," I said, "and consequently we do not understand the girl; but this much is certain: nothing of any intrinsic value has been taken, and Agnes is to be treated charitably and not made to feel that she is a pariah in this house; any one who makes her feel isolated is doing an unkindness to the family."

"Everything shall be as nearly as you want it as possible," she said primly, "but I must say, for my own self-respect, that the girl betrayed her trust, whether she is a thief or not. Personally, I cannot condone it."

"I would not change your principles, Mrs. Aldrich," I told her. "They are invaluable not only to you but to us. But we want this girl treated kindly."

She went out dissatisfied, but I knew she would do her best. Jed came in, still in his superserviceable mood.

"Would you like some coffee, sir?" he asked. I was tired and did want a stimulant.

"Yes, Jed, I would—thank you," I said as heartily as I could, determined to break down his triumph of imperturbability by a commonplace

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handling of him. When he brought the tray, I told him to sit down.

"I have many duties, sir," he protested. "There seems to be an accumulation of things in my absence."

At that reference to his recent experience he allowed himself to smile for an instant.

"Sit down," I said. "Your schemes have come to a bad end in this house. It will do you no good, and it may destroy the family. Things are beyond your control or my control. The Spaniard has the manuscript he was after. Your power is gone. It is transferred to him."

"I did not know there was a manuscript," he said.

"Don't act the hypocritical fool," I said. "You know that lawyer brought me a page from it."

"So you are familiar with this affair!"

"I am not. I only know what has happened since I came here. I do not want to know any more."

"You are wise. There is nothing but unhappiness and danger in knowing. It is not news to me that Dravada has Mr. Sidney's diary. They released me after they learned that the manuscript had been found and that the lawyer and Dravada had it."

Jed then sat down and told what had happened to him. I was very angry, remembering Isobel as

she came running in that night with her sleeve torn from her waist. I wondered that I could hear the man calmly, but he had extraordinary power, being moved by extraordinary emotions.

"In the first place," he said, "may I say that I have been preposterous? I think you understand how it is. A man's reason may be unsettled by violent thoughts. You have a kind of intelligence without experience. It is not of a very high order, but I think you have an instinct for understanding—not a trained and rational understanding, but an instinct.

"You think I am a lunatic. Sometimes I am, almost. It is easy enough to be a cabbage if you are one. It is sometimes hard to seem one if you are not. I've been a fool—but I've been hunting for something that I have not been able to find. I want happiness and importance. My egotism asks for it, but my common sense is going to have its way. That's preliminary."

Then he told his experiences. He had become violent with Isobel. He wanted it understood that he had been desperate but respectful. He had no idea of taking hold of her or of tearing her sleeve. She had been magnificent. She had given him a moral shock. He felt like a worm. He had been attacked suddenly by the men who had overpowered him. They had come upon him from the brush. He had recognised Dravada at once. He

might have overcome the Spaniard, but the desperate little lawyer, in a frenzy of activity, had been just bold and strong enough to interfere so that Jed had been made helpless. Another man had come breathlessly to help. Jed had been bound and gagged. He had been hustled into the screen of woods and beyond them to a waiting automobile.

His captors, in the automobile, had headed for the city and entered it after midnight. They had taken their prisoner to a tenement on the East side. For several days the lawyer and Dravada had tried to extort the secret from Jed by threats. They had tried to buy it by promise of an equitable division of profits. The lawyer had been quite rantic part of the time, Jed said, bounding about in an ecstasy of rage. At other times he had been friendly and persuasive.

He had held out to Jed's cupidity that he as an attorney could make a much better bargain with the Sidney household than Jed and that Jed might confidently expect more as his share than he could get if he continued to act for himself.

"That, of course, was ridiculous," said Jed by way of comment, explaining to me why he had not treated on a business basis with the attorney. "I never would have subjected Mr. Sidney to such an ordeal, and money never has been my object. What I have wanted was a complete life. But I

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could not tell the attorney how absurd he was."

Dravada had been savage and wanted to try torture, but the attorney, enraged as he frequently became in his failure and disappointment, would not permit this and had got a trustworthy rascal of his acquaintance, named Sim, with two other men, to keep a constant guard over Jed with a view not only to prevent his escape but to keep Dravada from doing him harm or taking him away.

The lawyer, both dismayed and enraged by Jed's obstinacy, had finally thought of corrupting some one in the house to find and steal the manuscript. The best he had been able to do was to persuade a maid to prove false enough to introduce the real thief.

"Dravada and the lawyer never had any hesitancy at having their quarrels in the room where they held me," Jed said. "Dravada wanted to stick needles under my finger-nails and burn my toes, drill my teeth and prod the nerves. Brown had a horror of physical pain. I do not think he had any moral scruples. He hated pain so much himself that he suffered physically if he knew some one else was suffering.

"He also was a bit of a drunkard. That little lawyer was very interesting. Life was a terrible thing to him. It was all twisted and distorted. It never could have given him anything he wanted. He thought he wanted money. The only thing that

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ould have done him any good was what he got when the car ran into the tree.

"He and Dravada became very suspicious of each other. Brown was afraid Dravada would corrupt the fellow Sim, torture me and get the story. Dravada was afraid Brown would corrupt some one in Hartley House and get the manuscript. Each one feared that the other would succeed independently and get away without making a division.

"Dravada pretended to be satisfied when Brown told him that he must not appear near Hartley. When they thought they were going to succeed in stealing the manuscript out of my room, Brown proved to Dravada that the only one of them that could go to meet the maid was Brown. Dravada appeared to accept that as reasonable, and he must have put Brown off his guard, because Brown told him all the plans.

"Dravada knew that Brown was a bit of a drunkard. Brown killed down his horror of life whenever he could—Mr. Sidney wants me to heighten his appreciation of life by drinking a bottle or two. Two different schemes for the use of intoxicants!

"Dravada used to be very stupid, but his cupidity has given him a sort of intelligence. He allowed Brown to think he was perfectly satisfied, but he wasn't at all. By seeming to be satisfied he learned all about the details of the plan, and he

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knew that Brown, to avoid pursuit, intended to take the way to Horwich.

"He knew that if Brown went through Horwich he would stop for several drinks. He would need them if he was disappointed. He would have to have them if he had the manuscript and was excited by it. So Dravada went to Horwich. It all worked out, and when Brown got to the village, he found Dravada. Then he telephoned to the fellow Sim to let me go. I was perfectly harmless. It was an interesting situation."

As soon as he was released, Jed had come immediately to Hartley, where his return was accepted as a matter of course. Mrs. Sidney and I were the only ones in the house who knew that his absence was anything out of a matter of course.

"I could wish Dravada had tortured you," I said to Jed. "He has the means now, through you, to torture this family."

"I said I knew Dravada had the manuscript," said Jed. "I did that for effect. What I ought to have said was that I knew he thought he had the manuscript. If I had no more than the intelligence you credit me with, Doctor, I could not have conducted this affair so long. What Dravada has is not the diary of Mr. Sidney."

CHAPTER XXXVII

UNTIL I felt the relief following Jed's explanation that the blackmailers had stolen only a decoy, I did not fully realise into what despondency our predicament up to that time had thrust me. If Mr. Sidney's diary were being read by unscrupulous men, we might expect anything.

The lawyer, whose shrewdness and lack of morals made him formidable, was dead. The Spaniard would soon discover his disappointment and would be furious. I thought the physical danger to Jed was greater than ever and found some pleasure in telling him so.

He was convinced of that himself and was not happy.

"Why don't you end your rascality?" I urged him. "Why don't you give the manuscript to Mrs. Sidney and allow her to make whatever disposition she wants of it? Then your conscience will be easy—your position in this house will for the first time be tolerable to a decent man, and your physical security will be promoted."

He would not. He seemed to hesitate for a moment, but his purpose was too long fixed and too much a part of his life.

"I certainly would not do it out of fear," he said. "I might out of consideration for other people, but that would be another form of weakness. You cannot understand me. There is no use of talking about it."

"A plea of being misunderstood is about the only thing you need to be wholly despicable."

"I did not say I was misunderstood," Jed replied without temper. "I said you could not understand, which is quite different, and true. You are a simple, dogmatic, satisfied man with no intricacies of character or thought. You think and talk like a copy-book. You may know something of the physical insides of people, but you know nothing of their moral or spiritual insides. You know as much about people as a clockmaker knows of a clock. So you wouldn't understand. Unless you can lay down a rule from a copy-book, you don't know what to say to life."

"I know rascality, cruelty, dishonesty, knavery and duplicity when I see them at work," I said, "and I never saw more of these qualities in one embodiment than are in your carcass."

"Copy-book—copy-book!" said Jed.

"Here's something more from the copy-book." I said: "If you continue to torment and terrorise Mrs. Sidney, or try to annoy Miss Sidney, I'll find a way to stop you if I have to make use of *vada*."

“Suppose we try to get along each in his own way without telling the terrible things we intend to do,” Jed suggested.

He no longer was surly with me, and I seemed to have lost my ability to enrage him. Consequently he had much better command of himself than I had of myself. I felt that he had the better of the controversy and knew that he must be conscious of it. We parted with my telling him that there would be no possible truce or peace between us unless he respected the women of the household. He bowed.

“Anything else, sir?” he asked; and then he departed as the servant.

Mrs. Sidney’s relief to find that the robbery had proved only a hoax on the robbers was such as would come from escape from tangible horrors. The lady had been keeping control of herself, as was necessary to protect her husband and daughter from her own agony of mind and to keep the household from finding significance in what could be passed over as a trivial piece of robbery.

When she learned that the alarm was over, she relaxed limply in her chair, and I feared that she might collapse; but in a moment she had struggled back to command of herself. Then she excused herself and went into her bedroom—for prayer, I knew.

Mr. Sidney’s joy at the return of Jed was robust,

to bed very tipsy with two bottles of
I found him in the hall as I went
the house. He was singing, but when
laughed and said:

good old moral copy-book—thinks

are clocks."

I knew we'd hear again and soon from Dravada, but not in what manner. Naturally I was apprehensive, and no doubt Jed was more so, although to save himself from my contempt he tried to conceal his fears.

The Spaniard could not be expected to accept his failure as final. He would try again. That expectation was fulfilled in a disconcerting fashion.

Thus far we had been dealing with chance, with apparitions and threats. We now came to deal with inevitability. Our experiences had been disagreeable, but they had not presented unescapable consequence. We had a choice of ways. Now we entered a way from which there was no escape.

Four days after Jed's return a man came to Hartley House and inquired for me. He was a detective. His name was Morgan; he was the head of the Morgan Metropolitan Detective Agency. I thought on first seeing him—while yet wondering what his business with us could be, and yet knowing instinctively that it had to do with Dravada—that this newcomer had more than a suggestion of shrewd malevolence in his face.

Before he was through his interview with me, or rather his inquiries of me, I knew that inevitability had entered our case. We were no longer progressing at the mercy of opportunity or chance. Morgan was fate. The whole aspect had been altered. Morgan, a muscular, black-haired, sordid, unscrupulous man of action and obviously of queer action, was pure Greek tragedy to us.

He was a curious instrument of such abstract justice. He served fate as if it had sworn out a police-court warrant. As a nemesis he was a clown, or at least a beadle or a bailiff. The manner in which he served inevitability will appear. Mr. Sidney's crime, I soon saw, whatever manner or kind of crime it had been, was one of unescapable consequence.

"A man named Dravada," said Morgan, after we had looked at each other in interrogative hostility for an instant, "has come to our agency with a very strange tale. From what I learn of the things he and his disreputable attorney have done, I can see that they are heading directly into the penitentiary. I understand that the lawyer is dead and that all their schemes are closed. Dravada has come to our agency, and I have come directly to you. I want you to understand our methods of doing business. They are honest. The paper Dravada carries about with him says that a crime has

been committed. Are you familiar with that paper?"

"I have seen what a blackmailing lawyer said was a copy of a sheet in the possession of Dravada."

"You never saw the rest of the manuscript?"

"I do not know anything about it."

"I am not much of a literary man," said Morgan, taking from a black leather case a manuscript which he handed to me, "but I've read 'The Moonstone,' and this looks to me like a couple of chapters copied out of it. Probably you are familiar with 'The Moonstone.'"

"I have read it several times."

"Then what do you make of that manuscript?"

I looked at several of the pages. The manuscript was a copy of part of "The Moonstone."

"I am right, then," said Morgan. "'Moonshine' it had better be called. That's the manuscript the maid stole out of your man Jed's room and that Dravada took after the lawyer had been killed. Here's my reasoning—maybe you will be interested: This man Jed and this fellow Dravada worked for Mr. Sidney in Montevideo. Dravada is a thief; Jed isn't much better. Dravada got one sheet of a manuscript that had something to do with a concealed crime. Jed got the rest of the manuscript, so Dravada says. Dravada has been trying to make Jed go fifty-fifty. He has been try-

ing to get the rest of the manuscript. He'll murder Jed yet.

"Now here's the way I look at it: A man like Jed does not go to the trouble of copying a couple of chapters of 'The Moonstone' and planting the copy in his room just to devil a desperate fellow like Dravada. He does it for a purpose. That proves he has the real manuscript. That proves there is a concealed crime. Our agency is interested in finding out what that crime was. Do I make myself clear?"

"Your meaning is much clearer than your words," I said.

"How am I to take that?" he asked.

"You know best," I replied.

"I see we'll get into some misunderstanding here," he said. "As an agent of the law I am interested in this case. Are you? Is this family interested?"

"I am not, and the family is not."

"I'll take your word for it, but I'll see Mr. Sidney."

"It is quite impossible. He never sees callers. I am his doctor. I should forbid it."

"Then I'll see Mrs. Sidney."

"That also is impossible. I am her representative."

"Well, I'll talk to Miss Sidney."

"That also is out of the question."

"I suppose you're something to Miss Sidney too."

"I am her fiancé."

"You are a little bit of everything around here. Well, how about seeing this man Jed?"

"That can be arranged," I said, and I rang for Jed. When he came in, I said:

"Jed, this is Mr. Morgan, of the Metropolitan Detective Agency. He wants to talk to you."

"Yes sir," said Jed, and I went out of the room.

In about twenty minutes Jed came to me again.

"Mr. Morgan wishes to speak to you once more," he said.

"Well?" I said, looking at him inquiringly.

"A downright, direct and positive sort of a person," he said, smiling, "but although keen, not a real intelligence. He is waiting for you, sir."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MR. MORGAN was pacing forth and back in the office much enraged.

"I don't seem to be able to interest any one in this house," he said.

"Were you unable to interest Mr. Arliss?" I asked.

"Who is Mr. Arliss?"

"You have just been speaking to him."

"Oh, that fellow, that Jed. Mr. Arliss! That's just it. That fellow a servant! He had the airs of a banker. A servant! Well, if that is the sort of servant you have, Dravada is telling the truth. That fellow has some hold in this house. Otherwise you wouldn't have him and he wouldn't stay. He's too smart."

"He is a perfect servant. Possibly he did not recognise you as a person he need be a servant to. Possibly you tried to bullyrag him. I suspect you did."

"Look here," said Morgan. "This does not get us anywhere. My time is valuable. I am wasting a lot of it. I'll tell you now I've got enough information to know this is the sort of case we like, a tough case. I haven't been fooled a bit.

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You may not be interested. Maybe no one here is interested, but I'm interested. Do you get that, Mr. Doctor, Mr. Representative, Mr. Fiancé? I'm interested."

"You'll please interest yourself in taking your departure," I said.

"In a minute. I'm wasting my time. But one minute more while I tell you something. This case is going to be gone into. There's a crime concealed somewhere which will do our agency good to discover. We sha'n't do it for money. We shall do it for publicity. The advertising will be worth thousands of dollars to us. Do you understand me?"

"I know you can make life very miserable for us for a couple of days. You will have to use your own judgment."

"I can pack that lawn out there with reporters and photographers from the city. They'll overrun your grounds. They'll climb the sides of your house. They'll see and talk to Mr. Sidney. Take my word for that. They'll see and talk to Mrs. Sidney and to Miss Sidney. I can bring that down to you by midnight."

"The house has some protections," I said. "You might suggest that to the newspaper people for their own good."

"The shyster and that common thief Ann Forth got in, didn't they?"

"I don't know Ann Forth."

"No, but you know Agnes Mitchell. Well, you know Ann Forth, man. Say, you simpleton, you don't know what you're up against. This story just as it stands—copy of sheet from manuscript—Spaniard—running off with Jed—theft of manuscript—death of shyster—Ann Forth back in house—hidden crime—millionaire recluse—beautiful daughter—haunted house—it's copy for every paper in the country."

I knew it and was appalled by the certain prospects.

"It would be a very cruel and useless thing to do," I said, "but as I told you, you must use your own judgment."

"That is, you appeal to my charity to give up this legitimate and valuable publicity; and yet I cannot get any coöperation in this house."

"No one," I answered, "is appealing to your charity or any other quality you may have. I simply tell you that what you suggest is cruel and useless and to do as you like. The kind of coöperation you want I do not know. You have talked to Jed. We are not interested in this child's nursery story you are following, and I do not intend to have people who are not well disturbed by the questioning of a detective."

I knew how to deal safely with Morgan, but the method was out of the question. I should indeed

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have been a simpleton if I had not known. All I had to ask was "How much?"

We were wholly resolved against paying blackmail, knowing that it was only a gradual descent to ruin. It was better to go in one direct plunge if it were fated.

Morgan looked at me steadily for a few moments as if giving me a chance to listen to the voice of reason. His method had been perfect. He was beyond a legal suspicion, and I knew he was dangerous.

"Well, young man," he said at last, "we are both wasting time—at least I am. But it's only fair to you to tell you that this is not the end of the case. It's the kind of a case we like, something tough and difficult. We may not make any money out of it, but when we are ready, we at least shall be paid in publicity. You needn't be afraid of the reporters and photographers just now. It's too good a case to waste that way. There's always that, no matter what we turn up.

"This case is just good enough to spend some money on. It's just good enough to send a couple of men down to Montevideo. I'll tell you in advance that that is what we're going to do.

"I don't know whether we'll take our friend Dravada or not. You can tell Mr. Arliss that we don't know. Dravada is very mad. He doesn't

take an affair of this sort very easily. He takes it bad. He's less of a literary man than I am. He never had read 'The Moonstone.' He didn't care for it, either. He doesn't like moonshine when he is looking for gold.

"Dravada is a fool and a thief, and it is a wonder he has not run straight into the penitentiary. It's my guess that he and the shyster and Jed would all be in the penitentiary now if there wasn't something in this house that protected them. That's just my guess, but I'll take a chance on it.

"So we'll go into the life of Mr. Sidney with a fine-tooth comb, and we'll do it well. We are accustomed to doing such things well. And we'll do this well. We'll get something here or in South America. We'll follow that something until we know why Jed copied two chapters of 'The Moonstone' and hid them in a box built in the springs of his bed.

"Then we'll come back here and ask for a little more coöperation in serving the purposes of the law, and if we don't get some help, the reporters and photographers will be swarming on the lawn. That's all, Mr. Doctor."

I knew at first glance that Morgan's face was malevolent. Now I saw it extraordinarily so.

"I'll have Jed show you the door," I said.

"And tell him we do not know whether we take

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Dravada to South America or not. It will make him happy."

Jed was scrupulously the servant as we dismissed Mr. Morgan.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THAT was the fashion in which inevitability entered the house. We were no longer dodging chance. Morgan surely and certainly represented fate. It had become only a matter of time when in one fashion or another the security of this home, so carefully studied, would be invaded successfully. That was apparent. It might be that Morgan would be able to expose us to nothing more than the publicity he mentioned. But that was sufficient; it would be destructive.

From the time this detective came until the end, I felt that our calamity was surely ordered. Morgan had little more directly to do with us. He proved to be scarcely more than an episode, but nevertheless he was the inevitable cause which had disaster certain as its consequence. A new intent governed the prospects of Hartley House.

These miserable events seemed to have violated sanctuary. Hartley House to me had been wholly built in romance. Its place was not in the workaday world—that invested but did not touch it. Its time-nurtured beauty gave it both dignity and isolation. This sanctuary had been broken into and defiled by preposterous events, and it was several

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days before I found that the place wholly regained its kindly aspect, before the tarnish came off its charm.

It is because a cherished thing is not stark materialism that it can be outraged by matters which do not affect it materially. It is a thing of associations, with vistas back into the memory and prospects into the imagination. Hartley House had been built partly by the architects and builders of many generations, but partly also by me. My building was of luminous gossamer spun by the fancy and coloured by the affections. In a few days, fortunately, the careworn, bleak aspect which the place threatened to assume wore away and vanished. There remained the sense that the house was beleaguered by enemies, but with Morgan gone, the threat became intangible. Possibly the threat had something to do with gradually enhancing the charm of the establishment—what an east wind does for a crackling fire. A sense of shelter comes with a pelting rain.

I had telephoned McGuire, telling him of Morgan's part in the new turn of events, and he later informed me that two of the Morgan agency operatives had sailed for South America, taking Dravada with them. The hunt had begun—but a long way off.

The hunters knew as much of the quarry as I did, and I had no way of knowing whether it was

likely that they could find a trail back to Hartley House. It was impossible not to feel uneasy. Dravada had been to me, whatever he had been to Jed, merely an incident grotesque and extravagant, a preposterous dash of colour in odd conditions. The lawyer had been resourceful and cunning enough, but his actions had to be those of a slinking feral animal. He was not to be greatly feared, but Morgan was. He had the machinery for the work. His cupidity was aroused. Every rascal who smelled the mystery of Hartley House became eager to follow the scent into the strong-box of the house.

I thought I was not assuming enough responsibility. Whatever could be done by one man was poor protection against resolute marauders. I asked Mrs. Sidney again if it would be of service to give me the secret of the house. I told her I was far from certain that my reliability and trustworthiness had been established, but if they had been, and if the question were merely one of fidelity and stanchness, I hoped I could be regarded loyal.

"If only those qualities were involved, John," said Mrs. Sidney, "you could have the inmost secrets of my soul. I would trust you with anything anywhere, but for your own salvation I would not have this terrible thing in your consciousness. Knowledge of it would curse you. It will me unless there is expiation in a great love, and exculpation in self-sacrifice. Jed's soul is gone beyond

redemption. I dare not think of Mr. Sidney nor of myself. But Jed is a gross sinner."

She was by nature and wish an unemotional, untheatric lady, but she was dramatic in her seriousness. Then she said:

"I should like to have you for a son."

I was much embarrassed—the more so when she kissed me. To conceal some disconcerting emotions I laughed awkwardly and went on about my business. I was to go blindfolded into the intricacies of the strangest situations I ever encountered.

With early October beautiful days came and brought tranquillity. Life is full of zest in October, the rich, rare month of the year; physical senses are made more sensitive. Hartley House blazed out in autumn splendour. What had been beautiful before was now glorified.

When Isobel and I rode in the morning, down the lanes and byways, which we preferred to the main-travelled road, we went by scarlet maple and white groves of birch, by aspen and beech with tossing yellow leaves, by country where dried bracken and wild asters nodded in the wind and where vesper sparrows billowed over the fields.

The Hartley House grounds had been fortunate, in some part of their past, to have a gardener with a passion for evergreens. He had massed white and Norway pine, spruce and balsam fir, tamarack in low, swampy places, hemlock and Norway fir, so

that now in this season of colouring leaf, the witchery of the changing woods stood revealed against the vibrant greens of the pines and firs.

It was difficult to be unhappy when nature was so insistent in spreading happiness, when blood tingled under the skin, which felt the air after a white frost, when the appetite quickened to the suggestion of robust foods and when life was full of colour and was important and serene.

I could have hours, but not complete days of happiness. I could use my common sense part of the time, but Isobel broke it down at other times. Occasionally I thought her willful and tried to believe that she amused herself by playing the devil with the only man available, but when I came to my senses, I knew I was a fool.

All she did was to associate frankly and friendly with the only available man, and if she liked to be with me, it was a compliment I did not see that I deserved. Nevertheless, as may be imagined, the situation was at times intolerable, and I would hide, like a coward, in the library or in my room—and hear her calling through the house: “John! Oh, John!”

When she wanted me, she roamed the place hunting and calling me. Her mother never learned to endure that without distress. She remonstrated, but Isobel only laughed.

If I were in a rational mood I called back or

went to find her. If I were in my intolerable moods, I stuck close to my place of hiding, and if trying to read, saw nothing but a girl and heard nothing but a voice calling "John," a call significantly proprietary, I thought, with a damnable suggestion of domesticity in it—damnable to me to whom it was a false suggestion, a torment, an unreal voice from a mirage.

With the return to normality, with Jed back and immediate alarms quieted, our family routine was reestablished. Dinner, which had been less the sociable occasion that it might have been, because of Jed's malevolent superserviceability, became a pleasant event. Something like a family bond had been joined, and Jed, for reasons sufficient to his eccentric character, did not make a pest of his service.

Heretofore Jed had made it a point to restrict and embarrass our attempts at easy conversation. Now he withdrew and left us to ourselves. This was a thing to be grateful for, and we were thankful, although favours from Jed were to be weighed, appraised, dissected and analysed.

It was owing to this extraordinarily favourable disposition that I, coming to dinner one evening in a sullen mood, had opportunity to take up a subject which concerned me.

"Mrs. Sidney," I said when Jed had placed the coffee-tray beside her and had retired, "I must ask

you to release me from the absurd position I am in."

"What position, John?" asked the kindly lady.

"I am engaged to Isobel," I said.

"Which is a torment and a trial," said Isobel.

"It is," I replied with warmth. "It is a trial and torment from which I wish release. I do not want to be hedged in by the absurdities of this arrangement."

"John, my boy," said Mrs. Sidney, "what's happened to you?"

"Nothing, but I'm confused. I'd feel better if Isobel and I were not on this preposterous footing."

"But there was a reason," Mrs. Sidney suggested mildly, "and it still exists, and we relied upon you, John. We don't want to make you unhappy, but you don't care for Isobel. That's so apparent, and it helps us so much."

"I don't care whether he cares for me or not," said Isobel suddenly. "We are going to remain engaged. Get your precise mind reconciled to the fact, John. While you are in this house, you and I are engaged to be married."

"Isobel!" her mother exclaimed.

"I'm going to have the freedom that this man John brings me as my betrothed," said Isobel. "Both of you can reconcile yourselves to that. John, you are a victim. You are engaged to me, and I know you are unhappy. Mother, you see me

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do things because I am engaged to John. Well, I intend to remain engaged and to do the things—and I love you both.”

And by George, she danced up and kissed her mother and kissed me.

CHAPTER XL

AT times I hated myself as a methodical person, but it did no good. I was methodical, and from it there was no escape. I kept a diary. And each night as I made an entry, I turned back to the day of the year before. In doing so this night I read in the entry of the previous year: "Mr. Sidney made a sudden and astonishing discovery of strength. He walked about his room without assistance and was in a high degree of animation. His great yellow cat, usually inactive, became almost kittenish and followed him, bounding at the tassels of his dressing-gown and bouncing away in a scurry, leaping from chair to chair and inviting pursuit, which Mr. Sidney attempted but abandoned laughingly."

I recalled that night with the sharper interest because the entry I was about to make this night was substantially if not precisely to the same effect. Mr. Sidney had again revealed an astonishing recovery of strength and had displayed the greatest animation. He had asked us to have our dinner in his room, a thing very seldom done, and he had been wonderful as the majestic, courteous head of the family, full of humour and joviality.

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Jed was an amiable servitor, bantered by Mr. Sidney from time to time. Isobel's animation was as infectious as her father's, but Mrs. Sidney, I thought, had a look of apprehension in her eyes which was something apart from the pleasant smile on her face. She seemed to find the occasion significant, and I wonder that I had to read my diary to be refreshed in memory.

When I had read it, I also saw the significance, and turning the page in the record of the year before, I read: "Mr. Sidney is in a condition of exhaustion which might be called a complete and dangerous collapse. . . . Dr. Brownell, summoned in alarm, says that during his acquaintance with the case this transition overnight from extraordinary activity to exhaustion has been noted once every year and at approximately the same time of the year, if not precisely on the same date."

The apprehension which Mrs. Sidney could not wholly conceal had this good foundation. Mr. Sidney was in the periodic miracle of renewed health and strength, but for whatever cause, he would be found to-morrow morning in a precarious condition of weakness.

The event seemed so certain that I thought it best to acquaint Dr. Brownell that night of the premonitory symptoms.

I first thought of arousing the chauffeur to drive me to the village or at least to bring a car around,

but recalled that at the late hour, after midnight, the village would be sound asleep and the station-agent, who was also telegraph-operator, might not relish being aroused. So I decided to telephone a message to Dr. Brownell's residence in the city, to be given to him immediately if he were awake or as soon as he arose in the morning. I did not want to be overheard, by any chance, by any one, in telephoning this premonitory message, and thought that the office would be my most secure place.

The house was not yet in full darkness when I came down the stairs to the main hall. It was lighted, and the stairway leading directly to Mr. Sidney's room was lighted, which indicated that Jed was still with Mr. Sidney.

The office door never was locked. I did not want Jed blundering in on me while I was telephoning. He would be along presently, I thought, and I decided to go out on the main portico until by the extinguishing of the lights I should know he was on his way to bed.

I was on my way to act on this plan when the light in the stairway leading to Mr. Sidney's room was extinguished, and I knew Jed was on his way downstairs. I did not have time to reach the entrance. I doubted that I even had time to retrace my steps. I did not want to meet Jed. So I stepped into a sort of little lounging space off the hall, which was quite dark.

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In a few minutes Jed went by, humming, not singing. I had expected him to be very tipsy, considering the jovial mood of Mr. Sidney; it had even occurred to me that once a year, on a certain date—one to be commemorated—Mr. Sidney joined Jed in the wine and that this caused the relapse. But Jed was not drunk; his step was steady.

He was turning out the lights, but he was reversing the reasonable process. He went down the hall to the light at the stairway leading to his room and turned it out. Then he came back, past the recess in which I stood, turning out lights as he went, and the last light he extinguished was the one at the foot of Mr. Sidney's stairs.

Now the hall was in complete darkness and was quiet. Jed, like myself, I guessed, was in hiding—but for what reason?

Then I heard the faintest stirring near by. It came nearer. I tried to keep from breathing audibly. I could hear another person's breathing. It was Jed, beyond doubt. He came into the recess where I stood. It was only five or six feet deep but fully twenty feet long. He was at one end, as nearly as I could judge. I was at the other.

The situation, a product of supercaution, had grown ridiculous and also a bit ghastly. Here were Jed and I, standing in utter darkness in a small recess in the hall, he not knowing of my presence, I not knowing his purpose.

I decided to make my escape. I had, as usual, my electric flash in my pocket. If he heard me and challenged me, I could throw the light on him, challenge him, say that I was on my way to the telephone to consult Dr. Brownell and make him explain. His position was the awkward one. I had an idea that even if he heard me he would not challenge.

I made my escape without noise—or if I made any, Jed did not care to inquire; and I found the office door in the dark. I intended merely to use the flash, find the telephone and do my errand in the dark. But I had just flashed the light once about the room when I heard a person at the door. This was not a stealthy person; the hand that touched the doorknob was resolute. By this time nothing rational seemed reasonable. The house of mystery had so asserted itself that one, hearing a noise, hid. Before me, revealed in the single flash of light, was a tall clock—and I was flattened against the wall the further side of that great clock before the person at the door was in the room.

The person carried a candle—and it was Mr. Sidney. He was completely dressed and wore an overcoat and a cap which came down over his ears. His hands were gloved, and he was well protected against more severe weather than that of this crisp October night.

His candle lighted the large room but dimly, and

I felt secure, seeing immediately that he had a definite object. He went to the corner of the room, took up a heavy cane which I had often seen standing there, and with it in his hand went toward the door as if his business in the room were done.

As he did so, I saw his face plainly in the candle-light. It was wholly changed: it indicated ferocity, hate, malevolence, a bitter sense of injury—a terrible face, hardly recognisable as that of our gentle, courteous, jovial Mr. Sidney. He closed the door and was gone.

When Mr. Sidney had been gone a moment, I heard him open the front door and heard him close it after him. I should have followed him to the front door, but Jed was somewhere in the hall. I waited at the half-open door of the office. Presently I could hear Jed coming down the hall, carelessly now. He also went to the front door, and I heard it opened and closed again.

I went to a window of the office which gave a view of the lawn. I could see one figure slowly crossing the open space toward the path leading down to the river. Jed was standing just outside the shadow of the house.

The further figure—Mr. Sidney, as I knew—passed into the dense black of the thickets by the path. Then Jed stepped forth and went quickly across the open. I went to the front entrance and stood on the porch.

CHAPTER XLI

THE hunter's moon was at full, and the place was luminous in a soft, misty yellow light. Late as it was in the year, a whippoorwill was calling in the oak grove, a circumstance which my nerves could have omitted from the conditions of this strange night.

I had tremors, frankly—felt the presence of tangible dangers, unseen, and of intangible terrors. I never felt such oppression, doubt, distress and dismay in my life. My patient was on a strange errand far beyond any strength I ever knew him to have; and Jed, whom I always dreaded, was following him.

It may be wondered why I was not instantly in chase and why I stood worried and indecisive. The only explanation is that I knew, as surely as one could know anything by reason and conjecture, that whatever was happening this night had happened this same night for a number of years in the past, and that whatever it was, it had direct connection with the secret of the place which Mrs. Sidney so earnestly desired me not to possess. For these reasons, or upon this instinct, I acted as I did and stood on the porch listening to the unnatu-

rally late whippoorwill and looking out toward the dark recesses of woods and thickets which stood at the edge of the yellow moonlight.

The tension was so great that I got a distinct shock when out of this wall of darkness came a figure running into and across the moonlit space toward the house. I knew it must be Jed, and I waited where I stood as he approached. He barely had come into the shadow of the house when another figure came out of the dark wall of the thickets and came slowly across the moonlit space.

Jed, running up the steps, saw me and gasped in astonishment, but recovered himself with wonderful promptness.

"Inside, man, inside, and act natural," he cried. "Come,"—taking me by the arm,—“in the office.”

He was so certain and so commanding that I did just what I was told.

"Into the office, man," he said, still clutching me. "What are you doing abroad? This night of all nights! But no matter. Into the office, and turn on the lights. Turn on the lights in the hall—not all of them, but some of them."

He ran to do it himself and was all flutter and activity. Then he ordered:

"Into the office now, and act natural. You're a man of genius: think of something we could naturally be doing at this time. Think quick, man; it's beyond me. What are we doing here? Good Lord,

what *are* you doing here? I could have managed it without you. Why did you have to be on the scene? And I can think of nothing!"

"You have severe cramps in the stomach," I said. "It's not to be wondered at, considering the way you abuse your stomach. I may say you are the only human being I ever was glad to see drinking himself to death. You have now some premonitory symptoms of gastritis. You have got me up. If I do not have a collar and tie on it will look more natural——"

I tossed these articles and my coat behind a couch.

"And possibly if you were less clad it would help the illusion."

Jed rid himself of collar, tie and coat and disposed of them in the same fashion.

"Now, I imagine," I said, "we are reasonably convincing as physician and sinner. What are your symptoms?"

"You're a man of genius!" Jed exclaimed. "Wait a minute."

He ran to the window, concealing himself behind a curtain.

"He's almost here," he said as he looked out on the ghastly white lawn. Then he came running back.

"The door had better be opened," he said, and he threw the door to the office open. Then he sat

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in one of the chairs and began to whine loudly.

"It's an acute, shooting pain, Doctor," he said loudly and then he whispered: "What ought it to be?"

I heard the front door open and shut.

"I have often told you," I said with loud professional dignity, "that there is a penalty attached to such habits as yours. Have you any nausea?"

"Sick as I can be with pain," said Jed, groaning tremendously.

"I don't mind at all being aroused, Jed," I said, just loud enough to carry to the person approaching and to sound to him as if it were a normal tone to Jed with me in the office. "That is a fair part of my business here."

I knew Mr. Sidney was standing in the doorway. So did Jed. Neither of us betrayed our knowledge until the strange apparition which we knew to be there said:

"Up so late, Doctor? Up so late, Jed?"

"Why, Mr. Sidney!" I exclaimed.

He was, indeed, an extraordinary-looking being. He had controlled his voice and his manner. Discipline was fixed in his soul. But he had not controlled his expression. It was of the wildest excitement. And yet how he tried to preserve the normalities, taken as he was in such strange circumstances!

"Mr. Sidney!" I exclaimed again and my

wonder was not simulated. "You abroad to-night at such an hour!"

He made a violent effort to keep his composure, and succeeded.

"I felt so well, Doctor," he said, "and I see so little of the place I love so much, that I took the only chance I had—this wonderful October moon and my faithful physician asleep and off guard, as I thought—to steal out a moment. But Jed——"

Here purpose took hold of him again and defied concealment; he became excited and caused me to have double dread of his to-morrow. "Jed, call the penitentiary," he commanded. "There's a convict escaped. I met him as I walked down the lane toward the river. Call the penitentiary instantly. He ran when he saw me, but I recognised him. It was that old fellow I saw working in the library at the prison. Call quickly."

Jed took up the telephone.

"Tell them he ran east toward the main road," said Mr. Sidney in great agitation. "He saw me and ran. But I recognised him. There could not be any doubt."

Jed had the penitentiary on the telephone. Yes, a convict, long trusted, had walked out of the prison gates. It was the old man in the library. They were hunting for him—had been for three hours in several different parties,—not because they feared to have him escape, but because he

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would be so miserable and unhappy in the open all night, and, liking him, they hoped to find him and bring him back to shelter. He had no use for liberty; it would only torment and torture him, but some whim—anyway, the old man was loose.

"He's on my place," Mr. Sidney cried to Jed—in a voice I never would have recognised as his. "We can't have convicts running about the place."

They would have him in a few minutes, said the man at the penitentiary, now that they had him located, and he would be as glad to get back as they would be to get him.

That closed the conversation, and Mr. Sidney, with one flash of spirit showing his eyes, gently and softly collapsed in his chair with a moan.

Jed and I, in alarm, got him to bed.

CHAPTER XLII

DR. BROWNELL came in the morning and found Mr. Sidney, as was expected, in extreme exhaustion. I explained that our patient had been, as usual the night prior to his alarming collapses, very animated and that after midnight he had stolen out of the house for a walk about the grounds, had encountered a convict escaped from the penitentiary and had come back in great excitement.

Restoratives were given Mr. Sidney, but Dr. Brownell said he responded with more difficulty and more slowly than on other occasions. For several days he lay quite passive, as nearly inanimate as a living person could be. His features were immobile but not expressionless. They seemed cast in one form, and the expression, I was very sorry to note, was unpleasant. I was sorry because I knew that was a false representation of a kindly man.

It was not a striking expression. It might not have been noted by a person who had not seen Mr. Sidney's face convulsed on several occasions in an agony of bitterness. His immobile features, as he lay unconscious, were set; and the expression, it

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seemed to me, was one of hate, indomitable, steady, enduring hate.

Dr. Brownell came once every three days for two weeks, during which time Mr. Sidney's recovery was painfully slow. His mind cleared and became active long before any strength came back to his body. As soon as his mind did clear, he was, in disposition, his former self. His eyes would banter the people about him with quizzical unworded interrogatories, even when he felt it too much an effort to speak. I thought that if such a thing were possible in so gentle a man, he was even gentler than ordinary. I am not exaggerating when I say that the benignity of the man was seraphic.

He was so content, so tired, so thoughtful of others, so insistent that this room should have none of the glooms of a sick-chamber. His canaries loved him, and by snapping his fingers he could bring them in an ecstasy fluttering and chirping about his head, a proceeding which the Persian cat, lying at the foot of the bed, eyed with an interest I distrusted.

I thought I saw a change of mood in him. There was, if I was right, a less insistent claim upon life. There was a yielding, an appearance of physical and spiritual acceptance of the law of three score and ten. If I were not deceived by little and impressive signs I noted, Mr. Sidney was substituting

complacently the will to die for the will to live which had been in him conspicuously indomitable.

On Dr. Brownell's last visit, he confirmed what was in truth a fear.

"Has Mr. Sidney, to your knowledge," he asked, "recently found a supreme satisfaction in any event?"

"None that I know of," I said. "Why?"

"He is changing. He is different now from anything I ever knew him to be. I always have believed that his case was out of our province, and that life and death, for him, depended upon resolve and that the resolve had a purpose. You have not found things wholly normal here, have you?"

"No, I haven't."

"There is something here," said Dr. Brownell. "I don't know what it is. You don't know what it is, but depend on it, something of importance to Sidney has happened. It may not have satisfied his life's resolve, but I think it has. For the present, he does not need me—possibly never again."

Jed observed the change in Mr. Sidney. Afterward I knew that he was a much more acute observer than I, for the good enough reason that his observation had a background of knowledge which I lacked. There was, no doubt directly as the consequence of this, an unbelievable change in Jed. He was very fond of Mr. Sidney. In our unhappy experiences with him, we had overlooked this fact

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and had failed to use it as we could have. His affection for Mr. Sidney was the one thing greater than his cupidity and self-love, with their attendant train of malevolence, violence, surliness, brutality and treachery.

He was convinced that Mr. Sidney was about to die, and the thought affected him tremendously. He became gentle; he abandoned his rasping manner—which, indeed, he never had carried into Mr. Sidney's room, but which was an intermittent provocation elsewhere. He was more than ever with Mr. Sidney, and each evening, after the others had gone, they had a bottle of wine which Jed drank; but he did not go singing down the halls afterwards. He was quiet and considerate, courteous to Mrs. Sidney and thoroughly friendly to me. He never was noticeably grief-stricken in the sick-room, but several times I came upon him unexpectedly elsewhere and found him apparently down in spirits.

"What's the matter with you, anyway, Jed?" I asked him.

"Doctor," he said, not in the least offensively, "you'll never find the secret of people in a copy-book."

October went and the brown month of November took even the white-oak leaves, and the woods stood in monochrome. Isobel and I rode every morning, and just before the early sundown we usually took

a short walk, to rustle the brown leaves underfoot and enjoy the sweetness of crisp air filled with the odours of a seemingly decay underfoot. Soon after sunset we were in Mr. Sidney's room. He greatly enjoyed to have the family about him, not engaged in entertaining him or waiting on him, but occupied in any amusement or work that could be undertaken by his fire.

Isobel and I frequently played cards and ate apples. We read, aloud for Mr. Sidney's benefit. He did not get stronger physically. The only time he left his bed was to sit in an invalid chair, for not more than an hour, by the fire.

Jed had a cot moved in and spent the night with him. He did not want the nurses to have this office, and as he was perfectly competent, I consented.

November went quietly. We had Thanksgiving dinner in Mr. Sidney's room, and his joviality made it a very pleasant event. Snow came with early December and gave us a more intensive indoor life, with the place sparkling in new beauty outside. Early snow, falling upon so baronial an estate, made the yule-log and the boar's-head possible in the imagination of even this generation.

It was an intensely happy and intensely unhappy experience for me. Mr. Sidney, I was convinced, would not live to the hepatica season. Isobel had permitted him to follow the changing seasons from

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spring to winter by bringing him flowers, and his delight at seeing the first hepatica had been as great as hers in bringing it to him.

Isobel could not realise that her father was dying. No one would have been so brutal as to tell her—or would it have been brutal? But Mrs. Sidney knew, I knew, Jed knew and Mr. Sidney knew—and was happy.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE day before Christmas came with a driving snow which set in with an east wind early in the morning. It was such a snow as makes a child's wonderland, obliterating the usual aspect of the winter out of doors and building a realm of purest white. It was a real Christmas snowstorm, heavy, persistent and driving but not unkindly.

Even to men and women, a child's imagination returned under the magic of this scene—the grey sky, darting, tossing snowflakes, woods and brush mantled in white which clung to trunk and branch. The storm continued all day long.

In the afternoon Morgan of the Metropolitan Agency came, driving with difficulty through the drifted banks of snow in the roads, to see me again. I was full of apprehension as I told Jed to show him in. His mood was different from what it had been before, when he almost raged out of the house. It seemed to me everybody's mood was changing.

Nevertheless a child's fancy came into my mind. Outside was the storm through which travelled fierce animals of northern forest, and here, out of the storm, came the werewolf.

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"Doctor," said Morgan, "we have done a great deal of work since I saw you. I told you we would, because the case interested me. We have traced Mr. Sidney through every known operation and act—so long as we can find him as Mr. Sidney. Every act is honourable; many of them are acts of astonishing charity and kindness. That is so far as Mr. Sidney exists."

He paused and looked at me as if to see whether he was reaching any hidden spring which if touched and sprung would open the secret. He did not believe I was truthful.

"Mr. Sidney's life is open, honourable and full of nothing but good for fifty years back," Morgan continued. "We have investigated very thoroughly. But fifty years back, Mr. Sidney disappears, evaporates. There is no Mr. Sidney that can be found. We find a young man of twenty, and nothing back of him. There we stop. It is a blind alley. You come to nothing but a wall. That stopped investigation.

"Now, I go a good deal by hunches—call it intuition, guessing, inspiration. It is not good detective method. I don't claim it's good detective work. I never work on a hunch and neglect a rational method, but frequently when I do work on a bit of guessing we get results.

"I've been working, around here, on a guess that was so wild when it first started that it seemed too

preposterous even for me. I'll tell you that we are not investigating Mr. Sidney any more. We are looking for another person, and I believe we are going to find him. Then we are going to find some one else. Doctor, I tell you, if you don't know it, as you say, it is the strangest case I ever have known. It is one of hate. Mind, I'm only guessing."

That touch was so impressive that I betrayed an emotion. He saw it.

"I had you there," he said.

"Mr. Morgan," I said, "you will not believe me, and for that reason it is useless for me to say and keep on saying that I know of nothing here I could help you on. You suggested something to me just now, and you saw that you had done so. But that was because of a coincidence immaterial to what you call a case."

"Very well," said Morgan. "I did not expect to get ahead by coming here, but I want to be fair and reasonable. You do not know anything, but I am not allowed to talk to any one who might know."

"You have talked to Jed," I said. "You cannot reasonably expect to be allowed to annoy the ladies of the house or to flutter the servants. Mr. Sidney is very ill and very weak. Even you would refrain from introducing your case to him if you saw him. If we seem to avoid your inquiries,

it is unfortunate. We have nothing to avoid."

"I follow my hunch," said Morgan, getting to his feet. "If I am right, something will be revealed that even I could not compromise. I am afraid you must prepare yourselves for some publicity."

"I have told you before that you must select your own course," I replied, and Morgan took his leave, driving away through the snow.

There was no abatement of the storm. The snow came in swirls and gusts, and the wind increased in violence until by evening it was souging and skirling in the many gables and around the many corners of Hartley House.

We had our Christmas Eve in Mr. Sidney's room. He was very feeble physically and could be raised on pillows in bed but nothing more. But he was the spirit of joviality. He had Jed sit in a great arm-chair by his bed, and early in the evening he had a bottle of claret opened for him. Nothing would do but Mrs. Sidney and Isobel should have a bottle of Madeira, and I had a whisky toddy. A great punch-bowl was brought in, and Jed mixed gallons of liquor and many spices in it.

Four of the menservants came in with a great log for the fire, and had large cups of punch before they went out. Mr. Sidney evidently was determined to corrupt the whole household.

I'll never be able to give an adequate idea of the joviality of that Christmas Eve in the sick-room.

Mr. Sidney and Jed had conspired for some months to make a festival.

Our dinner, served in Mr. Sidney's room, brought a boar's-head, carried by a laughing maid. Wine was sent to the servants. Isobel found a pearl necklace in what had seemed to be a baked sweet potato. I found a gold watch in a box under a few leaves of lettuce. Mrs. Sidney found merely a note in a bunch of violets which was given her with ceremony.

She read it and had difficulty to remain wholly composed. She arose and went to her husband, taking one of his hands and putting an arm about his shoulders. Then she kissed him and stood a moment before the fire before she trusted herself to come back to the table.

When the dinner was done and the covers were removed, more wine was brought in. A large Christmas tree was lighted, and all the servants were called. Each found a valuable present in the tree; each had punch from the great bowl, and each, coming to shake Mr. Sidney's hand, was given by Jed an envelope which, I learned afterwards, contained a hundred-dollar bill.

There was no constraint and no awkwardness such as might mark such proceedings; the people of the house knew Mr. Sidney too well. One of the maids kissed him, and then we had them all doing it.

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I was fearful that the excitement would injure him, but he was placid, smiling and happy. When we were alone, we sat an hour by the fire, and then I dismissed every one peremptorily.

Jed, who had been about his duties, returned. The fire was tended. Another bottle of wine was ordered. I had my last look at Mr. Sidney alive as I stood by the door giving Jed his final instructions for the night.

Jed sat in the armchair. All the lights except one by Jed's chair had been extinguished. The Persian cat was stretched by Mr. Sidney's side. The canaries were asleep perched on the head of his bed. The fire was glowing.

"Good night, Mr. Sidney," I said. "Good night, Jed. A pleasant evening."

"Good night, Doctor," said Mr. Sidney. "Just a minute, boy. Come here."

He reached out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said.

CHAPTER XLIV

MR. SIDNEY died between three and four o'clock Christmas morning. He passed so easily that Jed, sleeping in the lounge-chair beside him, did not know that death had gone through the chamber until an hour after the event. Jed awakened me. In the case of such an expected happening as this, the perceptions start slowly. The fact that the benignity which so imperceptibly had dominated the house had ceased to exist took hours to assert itself.

Jed was composed when he aroused me. Later, when the sun came up to make radiant all the white witchery the storm had left, his sense of loss began to assert itself, and acute as was the grief in the house, none was deeper seated or more profound than that of the rascally old servant.

My ideas of life must have been, as Jed frequently had twitted me, merely an assortment of axioms which took no account of such phenomena as this master and servant. Jed's emotion was intense and sincere. With a sternness which was stoic, he tried to repress it and deny himself the ecstasy of grief which he craved, but as much as

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he could control his words and acts, he could not control the expression of his face.

Mrs. Sidney accepted the event with a serenity which I discovered afterward was born of a long-fixed resolution. For her a life of compromise with conscience was over, and what remained of life was to be accepted and devoted to expiation of a crime she felt she shared with her husband, to whom her devotion was more compelling than the dictates of her moral nature.

For years her life had been a denial of her moral instincts—happy, in spite of that, because of her great devotion to the wonderful man she loved. The chapters which he dominated in her book were ended. With tenderness she laid them aside.

Isobel did not permit herself indulgence in any weakness. What had happened was written in the contract of life. In later full knowledge of Isobel, I never ceased to admire the wonderful acceptivity with which she met her trials. Nothing came to her with catastrophic shock. She had reality within her vision, and she perceived.

For myself I saw the end of a mode of life which, even when unhappy, had been ecstatically so. My reason for being in Hartley House lay dead in bed.

I should look back, I knew, many times, as a struggling practitioner, possibly in poorer districts of the city, possibly in a small town, to the strange but beautiful time when I was at Hartley. This

experience would be only an episode, remaining as the memory of a time when my life halted for a wonderful moment, satisfying, rich and joyful, and—having had this moment—went on in the drab fashion ordained for it. An occasional kindly letter from Mrs. Sidney, or possibly from Isobel, might quicken the memory, but I and this period would fade from their lives as it never could from mine. I should be packing a pill-case on late and unprofitable rounds in that soul-destroying routine with its ceaseless invasion of the intimate personal economics of uninteresting people, abnormally egotistic in the pain of a small or large disorder—the cheerless life of a small physician, serving his useful purpose, I have no doubt, but how little serving his own!

We got through Christmas Day in a dazed fashion. The necessary offices for the dead compelled a routine which relieved the tension, although they contributed a dulled terror to the day—those terrible, exacting practical details with which some one in the bereaved family must occupy himself. Mortuary details are jocose to the pessimist. I know no more comic figure than an undertaker, no more gigantic shaft of human egotism than a tombstone.

Mr. Sidney, we found, had left brief but explicit directions for his burial. This, in the case of a man with life so well conceived, was strange, but

CHAPTER XLV

JED drew a chair up to the fire by my side. It was with a strange feeling of relief that I accepted the significance of the manuscript he carried.

"I'm a strange man, Doctor," he said by way of beginning. "You'd never understand me. I'm a strange man and I do strange things. I'm going to do one now. I've seemed conscienceless, haven't I?"

"I've never tried to conceal my opinion of you," I said.

"No, you haven't. I like a candid man. That's why I've always liked you, although I can't say much for your intelligence. But you're honest. I'm not honest, but I'm intelligent. I've looked at my life as something to make the best of, and I haven't been foolish about scruples. I am a materialist. A conscience is very easily handled, but an empty belly is not so easily ignored.

"I've managed my chances, and I have not allowed sentimentalism to stop me when something real was to be gained. It's a real world, not a fanciful one. That's the way I think."

"Half the people would be swinging on gallows,"

I suggested, "if your amiable ideas prevailed generally."

"That's more of the copy-book stuff that's so irritating," he said. "The only thing extraordinary about me is my candour. My ideas do prevail, but the people who adopt them have less frankness. They act the way I do, but they try to conceal it even from themselves. It's a real world governed by real appetites and glossed over. But what I want to say is that I'm going to do a strange thing. You'll probably think it an act of contrition. It isn't at all, but you'll think it so. However, that's unimportant.

"You may not know it, but I was very fond of Mr. Sidney. He was the best friend I ever had or ever shall have.

"Now, I have guarded against acting impulsively or sentimentally. I know I am in an acutely emotional condition. I have guarded against that. I am still considering the world as a real world and myself as a real creature in it. And here's the way I figure it. Mr. Sidney's death has taught me that materialism is not enough. It is necessary, but there is something else. I've got to find another something else. That's more important than any money or comforts—physical—that I can find.

"Where is this something else to be found again if not right here in this family? I have determined to remain in your service after you marry Miss

Sidney, and to take care of you and her and Mrs. Sidney. I couldn't leave. The roots are too deep. I could be cut down but not dug up. I'm too old. So as a real creature in a real world I consult my real good, now as always, and I hope I do not seem to you to be acting sentimentally."

"You seem to me to be wholly crazy," I said. "When you speak of Miss Sidney's marriage to me, you are not only ironic; you are cruel. I should think that this particular day might make you at least considerate."

"You're the blindest man I ever knew," said Jed, "but I'm not dealing with what you think but with what I know. I told you once your engagement was an unreal thing and that I did not consider it at all. Later I took that back. Now I can tell you that it is a very real thing, but it is different now with me. I have suffered a shock. Something's the matter with my world. It is not so bold or confident."

"What I'm getting at is this." He held up the manuscript. "This is Mr. Sidney's diary. I have talked to Mrs. Sidney. She thinks, as I think, that you should read it. You'll probably want to confirm what I say. You'll have to ask Mrs. Sidney. I know you are itching to read it. I also know that if one of your scruples intervened, you'd let your itch go unscratched. But this is what I came in for, and here's the manuscript."

"You understand that in giving it to you I surrender unconditionally. I know it, but I want friends. The only one I had is dead; I must make other ones."

The extraordinary fellow shook my hand, left the manuscript in my lap and went out, a more pathetic figure of sorrow than I ever expected to see in Jed.

I went at once to Mrs. Sidney. Jed, I said, had left the diary with me. Would it serve any useful purpose for me to read it, or should it not go directly to the fire?

"I think you should read it, John," she said. "I told Jed so. He is very shrewd. His judgment and mine in this case agree."

I went back to the office, put a log on the fire and sat down to read the diary.

CHAPTER XLVI

I SHALL not pretend to give more than an idea of the manuscript I read there by the fire that night. It was narrative and reflection and contained the story of the life of Arthur Dobson, known to me heretofore as Mr. Sidney. I shall give extracts from it:

A family is an odious imposition of cruel conventionalities upon individuals who, accepting conventions, however odious and cruel, are helpless. The bond of blood is one no animal (animals being rationalistic) tolerates, even recognises, but it is imposed upon human beings, who find that the most antagonistic natures must reconcile themselves to an arbitrary rule of life which can come only to hideousness.

There were in our family two children, my brother Richard and myself. Our parents were the ordinary folk who marry and have a family. My father was an uncommunicative man, whether from a habit of silence or a lack of anything to say, I do not know.

Ordinarily he sat dumb at the table or in the living-room, saying nothing except by way of com-

mand or reproach. My mother, as I recall her, was gentle but, I imagine, futile. I think if she had had a chance of establishing a personality my silent, glum father had destroyed it.

Richard was my elder by two years. My father was wealthy, very wealthy, and Richard and I were not disciplined as to money. My father was not penurious, but I never knew a man who obtained so little good of his money. He had no social instincts; he had no joviality. A carter with twenty-five cents to spend in a public house would get a deeper and better experience in human life than my father could get by spending twenty-five hundred.

He liked occasional ostentation—a petty form of vanity and egotism. I regarded him, or my memory of him, as wholly detestable—a sentiment which will offend the sentimentally conventional, or the conventionally sentimental. I know he was the last man I would have chosen as a father.

But this scheme of life had this in it that brought disaster to his sons—a laxness of any discipline related to their spiritual and mental development. When we were corrected or punished, it was for conduct which affected his comfort or dignity, never for a thing which affected the development of our character.

We had abundant money to spend. It was a part of our father's egotism that we should be

young swells, and we were early in disorderly ways. Richard had a genius for cruelty. A normal boy is likely to be thoughtless, but Richard was inventive in his cruelty. It was brutal. He liked to tear things to pieces slowly, a fly if it was all he could catch—a grasshopper, a field-mouse. I had a faithful little dog which Richard staked out in the ground and killed by vivisection. I saw the little animal when it was breathing its last with its bowels exposed and its lungs laid bare.

Richard destroyed birds' nests for pleasure. He liked to cut a leg off a hen and see it stagger about vainly trying to walk. He maimed dogs. He tortured cattle and horses. He killed a fine carriage-horse by driving it to death purposely to see how long it would live under the treatment he gave it.

I doubt that I was a more lovable child, but at least I did not have the attribute of cruelty. I was not only younger, but I was weaker physically. I was sensitive to a degree which made me an extraordinary victim to Richard when he cared to express his fiendishness to or upon me.

We were getting into late childhood—I should say that I was about fourteen—when Richard began to use his inventiveness in cruelty upon me directly. As soon as he had a taste of the delight which came from tormenting me, I had no further peace.

I remember with a still-agonised vividness my experience in finding a snake in my bed. He had put it there. He used his superior strength to torture me physically. He dominated me spiritually. He made life a hell, such a hell as life can be made only for a child by mistreatment, when reality has not starkly asserted itself, when proportions are not established and when illusions can be kindly or hideous.

Richard and I grew up to this fashion, I in terror of him and his malevolence. When I was fifteen, mother died. She had been an unassertive mother. Circumstances and conditions were beyond her strength of mind or body, but she had been a friend, and I missed her cruelly. It was really a terrible loss at a time when I much needed a friend.

At her funeral, Richard amused himself sticking a pin in my leg, enjoying my really Spartan determination to endure the pain. . . . I say that I resent the tyranny of the family. What did I have in common with this young powerful beast? My brother? The thought of relationship sickened me. I hated the brute. The fact that we had the same parents established an unnatural, not a natural, relationship.

As we grew older, Richard's diabolical habits became only shrewder, not less assertive. He contrived the most ingenious schemes for my torment.

He humiliated me whenever possible before other boys and, better for his purpose, before girls.

My father put us out to school together, and this suited Richard's purpose admirably. How I hated this thing that bore my name and my blood! It became an indomitable hate. It exists to this day. No human being ever was so hated by another as my brother Richard was by me—and is—is to this moment and will be hated while a breath remains in my body.

When I was eighteen, my father died, and Richard and I inherited the estate under a trusteeship to continue until I was twenty-one. Richard was then twenty. In another year he attained his majority. He was profligate and wild, a heavy drinker, a coarse, cruel boor, a licentious young ruffian who had suffered twice in actions brought by weak and unfortunate girls.

It irritated him beyond expression that he had to wait the slow process of my coming of age before he could come into his share of the property. His constant demeanour toward me was violent. Several times I tried to establish the reasonable relations which ought, in convention, to exist between brothers. It was quite hopeless, and my hate for this boor came to be an intense passion. It remains as a passion now.

I may not be able to satisfy any one that this was the inevitable consequence of the treatment given

me, but I could if I were to elaborate the details—or merely state them. However, my purpose is not so much to indict my brother as to record my own triumph—to assist the commission of a crime which has been of intense satisfaction to me, a crime in which I have maintained my culpability with joy and from which Richard has suffered and is suffering.

He is a broken old man. He is in a penitentiary.

CHAPTER XLVII

HERE followed a section of the manuscript from which, as I recognised, the page Dravada had taken, was missing. Then it continued:

I became a little more assertive of my rights and dignity, with the result that our quarrels were more violent. I tried to fit myself physically to meet Richard, but he was very sturdy, and his profligate habits had not yet undermined his health. When I resisted him physically, he had the better of me. Three times he knocked me unconscious. Once I was ill in bed a week as the result of a beating he gave me.

Frequently he threatened that he would kill me. He said this often and openly, with every evidence of earnestness and determination. Later that counted against him.

I was not cowed, and with the great hatred firmly rooted, I was willing to accept the unequal struggle with him. It was a joy to hate him, fight him, even to be beaten by him. I had regained enough courage to seek sociability. It was difficult, because his refined sense of cruelty led him to

search me out, wherever I might be with my friends, and to humiliate me, if possible, before them.

One night I had been at a tavern in the village with some boys of my acquaintance when Richard, being drunk and very violent, found me, and there was a scene in which he made loud threats that he intended to kill me.

One of my friends persuaded me to go home. At Hartley House we walked the distance from the house to the village in those days. I set out alone, but Richard, breaking away from the young men who would have detained him, pursued me. He caught up with me, and we abused each other as we walked, being overheard by several persons along the way.

When we came to a pool by the river near the house, he became insanely violent, cried that he was sick of seeing me on earth and would rid himself of the sight of me. He attacked me with a heavy stick he carried, succeeded in breaking down my guard and knocked me unconscious. Our cries, while he was attacking, were heard by a farmer living across the road. Richard was insanely drunk. He intended to kill me and thought he had done so. He left the spot, disturbed, probably, by the thought of physical consequences but, I am sure, not by any spiritual misgivings.

I do not know how long I remained unconscious or when I awoke. It may have been ten, forty or

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sixty minutes. It may have been an hour or two. When it was, consciousness brought an aching head and a dawning determination.

Life with Richard at Hartley House had become impossible. I could no longer control him, I could no longer endure him.

A chance of escape and of revenge was possible. I was, in Richard's understanding, dead. He had tried to kill me. He might be made to think he had. I had considerable money with me. Richard, of course, had not touched it. Each of us had been given, that morning, five hundred dollars by trustees. That had been the occasion of Richard's murderous debauch. It is strange—or is it?—that I never think of him as, or ever called him, Dick.

I got up with a bloody and aching head and a real determination. Richard had laid himself in my hands. The murder of me by him was complete in every circumstance except such as I should try to supply by deceit. My determination was the most resolute emotion I ever have experienced in my life. A volume of hatred and resolve to be square with my persecutor, at whatever cost to myself, had reached an opportunity and a course of action.

I arranged the spot as well as I could in the details to suggest that my drunken and brutal brother had not only killed me but had disposed of

my body in the river. When I had done this, relying for success on his uncertain memory of the act which already had terrified him, I left Hartley House—all its painful memories and brutal experiences, the unhappiness I had experienced there, the miserable childhood, the wretched boyhood and the young manhood, come to this futile, malevolent end. And I there resolved that if I got safely away and if my design worked out successfully, I should return to the selfsame spot sometime to live a jovial life where life had been so drear.

My plans were not perfect; my resources and my intelligence for this sudden meeting of the world were slender; but my success was beyond expectation.

First I had the satisfaction of knowing that my brother was taken for my murder. Circumstances were all against him, and he was convinced in his own heart that he had not only killed me as he so often had wished to do, but that he had disposed of my body.

In arranging the spot to indicate a murder I had thrown my hat, which was broken and bloody, down the bank. It had caught on a projecting rock. I had taken a ring off my finger and had thrown that into the pool. I also had thrown in my coat. It had blood on the collar and shoulders. All this seemed to me to afford inconclusive evidence, but.

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there were obvious difficulties in finding a body which might increase Richard's troubles.

I waited in New York, carefully concealed, many months, reading of the progress of my murder-trial in the newspapers. It gained some celebrity. The prosecuting zeal was tremendous, and public interest, I gathered, acute. My ring was dredged up and was regarded as important evidence. The dredge also brought up some bones which, as I read in the papers, were regarded as fish-nibbled remains of me.

Much legalistic argument ensued. I became a case of importance, involving principles of evidence. The superficial facts were all against Richard. His confession faced him. The evidence I had arranged damned him. Our relationship in hate and his threats against me arose against him. He thought he had killed me. He knew he had. There were many witnesses against him.

The only thing helping him was the lack of a clearly identified body. But there were vestiges of something which, in the circumstances, were accepted as parts of the *corpus delicti*. I think the prosecution and the jury, convinced that I was dead and my remains swept away, were anxious to meet technically the requirements of law.

The story of our lives together, as I read it in the testimony of witnesses who knew more of its terrors than I thought any one knew, was terrific.

It would have damned any aggressor in the opinion of any body of men. Every one who knew anything of the case, Richard himself included, was convinced that I had been murdered. The doubt which remained merely served to get Richard a life sentence instead of the gallows. Popular psychology condemned him. The lack of essential evidence was ignored.

I waited until I knew what his fate was, and then, rejoicing, I left the country. I had no prospects and few plans, but my inclination was to go to South America, and I followed it.

My hatred never ceased. It grew as a passion, at first a disturbing one, later a satisfactory one. I wanted this man to suffer. Nothing that he can suffer will properly pay him—at least it will not pay my score.

Some day, I know, for I have the determination, I shall return to Hartley House as its owner, although esteemed an alien, with a false name, a false life and a great joy. What is a family that I should not enjoy my perfect revenge upon this brute who made fifteen years and more of my life, in its most impressionable form, an undesirable thing when it was most desired?

I shall go back to Hartley House, and if life and health be spared me, I shall make it and life in it jovial, and if strength be spared my will, the knowledge that my brother Richard is suffering for

the murder of a dead live man shall be the cosey north wind in the eaves below which burn my cheerful fires.

This is my crime, and if it causes no one dear to me later to suffer, I want it known. Some day I shall go back as a man wholly unknown to people who knew the Dobsons. I shall be what I have been, Alfred Sidney. I shall buy the old place. I shall know that Richard Dobson is suffering a most equitable but illegal punishment in a penitentiary close to the place where I shall live in the circumstances which a great deal of money will enable me to set up.

That is my natural revenge upon a fiend who happened to come of the same parents as I. Hate is a wonderful friend.

CHAPTER XLVIII

JED came into the room again as I finished reading, and put another log on the fire. Then he sat down in a rocking-chair by the fire.

"They met that night, you know," he said after he had rocked a while.

Probably it was not astonishing that I had a curious derailment of ideas. There had been the impact of this discovery against my perceptions, and I was not paying much attention to Jed.

"They?" I said.

"Arthur and Richard Dobson," said Jed. "Mr. Sidney and his brother, who is over there in the penitentiary."

"They met what night?" I asked.

Jed was patient.

"They met the night last fall," he explained, "when you found Mr. Sidney leaving the house, the night I found you outside, the night we pretended I was sick, the night he came in here and had us call the penitentiary to say a convict had escaped. That night, he met his brother. His brother was the convict."

Jed was rocking and talking to the fire.

"Mr. Sidney—Arthur Dobson——" he said,

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"went out to see the pool on every anniversary of his murder. He found the strength out of some reservoir of will. The reaction was almost disastrous. I imagine he might have lived another year or two if he had not had the experience he had this fall.

"I knew it was a great hate that was keeping Mr. Sidney alive," he continued. "Such a hate as he had! I don't know that I understand it now. It was so unprofitable. Or was it? I do not know. It had a great value in his life. I think the hate he cherished warmed and coloured his life.

"He went to the pool every year the night of his murder. He did not know that I went with him. It was such an abnormal abuse of his strength. I was afraid for him."

"Your prospects depended upon him," I suggested.

He allowed a moment to pass in silence. It was as if he permitted ventilation before we again entered the room of common thought and communion. He did not look pained or hurt in any fashion. There was no display about it. He just refrained for a moment from talking. It was as if he were opening the windows for that moment. When the air was cleared of the odours of my testy remark, he went on as if I had said nothing. The old rascal was very difficult to deal with.

"The night I am reminding you of," he said, when he thought the air was fresh again, "he met Richard Dobson at the pool and recognised him. The poor old fool, Dick, had walked out of the penitentiary. He had every opportunity to do so. The warden would have let him out if he had asked to go. He was helpless outside. He did not have a place to get a rag or a crust. But he wanted to escape.

"There must have been something in his mind about this night and this place. Arthur Dobson found his brother standing by the pool. I was fifty feet away, hidden by the bushes. I could see the two old men in the moonlight, and when Arthur Dobson began to speak, I could hear distinctly.

" 'Well, Richard,' " said Mr. Sidney, 'we are here again.'

"Richard Dobson quavered in a weak, senile tone, almost a falsetto: 'Who are you?'

" 'I'm your brother Arthur,' said Mr. Sidney. 'What are you doing here?'

"Richard Dobson must have known that he was confronted by a ghost. He made a shrill little sound, as an old woman might. I was palsied. The situation was tremendous. I didn't know what would happen, and I didn't know what to do. Mr. Sidney was calm as an oyster.

" 'I am your brother Arthur, Richard,' he said, 'and I am not dead. I haven't been dead. You

didn't kill me. I have been living in the old place comfortably while you have been in prison. No one would believe you if you told that. You are old and half crazy. If you were out of prison, you would die of starvation and exposure in twenty-four hours. I am not a ghost, Richard; I am your living brother.'

"There was a lot of malevolence in Mr. Sidney's tone, a tremendous amount of hate. Richard Dobson uttered the quivering, quivering little cry again and started to run. As he got under way, he shrieked. It sounded like an old woman's shriek.

"Mr. Sidney started after him. He had that cane you saw him take out of this room. That was the one he was beaten down with.

"I think for a moment he wanted to kill Richard. He flourished the stick and yelled. Richard, being in a frenzy of fright, was stronger on his legs than his brother. He was off into the bush. Mr. Sidney stumbled and fell. He got up rather slowly, as if he were either hurt or as if his strength were leaving him. I could hear Richard shrieking farther off in the bush.

"When Mr. Sidney got up, he turned toward the house, and I ran to beat him here and found you."

Jed rocked a while, and I did not say anything.

"I am decidedly shaken," he said after a while.

"I was very fond of him, and I am a useless old

man, an alcoholic of no account except to him, and he is dead."

"There is only one thing to do," I said. "Richard Dobson must be on his way to freedom to-morrow. We shall have to see to that."

Jed aroused himself for an instant.

"You copy-book moralist!" he said. "You would interfere with a genial, lovable man's magnificent hate just because he is dead and your scruples have become important. You ought to choke. Let the brute Dick Dobson rot in prison. It's his desert."

"It can't be done, Jed," I said. "To-morrow we'll go to Alwick prison and explain."

CHAPTER XLIX

FOR me to act without telling Mrs. Sidney was impossible and it was almost impossible for me to take the subject up with her. I saw her only for a moment, told her that, being acquainted with the facts, I thought I knew what the conscience of the house would require.

Her world had been destroyed; her light had gone out. She had no pride for herself; she shrank from the possibility of a hurt to Isobel, but I had judged the conscience of the house correctly. She would have protected Mr. Sidney against all the equities and justice in the world—that was her sin in her own esteem. But now he was dead: justice could be done.

I did not want to act without Isobel's knowing what I was doing. I hoped she would approve of what I intended to do, though I intended to do it whether she did or not. I had to tell her the story.

"You are right, John," she said. "But how magnificent Father was! He was stark Nemesis, the cleanest, purest justice there is!"

She was a bit ecstatic. They teach young ladies too many generalisations, I thought. There was no rhapsody in this; it was ugly.

Jed had one more flash of spirit as we started for the penitentiary.

"You poor old copy-book fool of a moralist!" he said. "Why can't your insignificant conscience be satisfied without doing a lot of damage to no good end? Hang you moralists! You wreck life. Richard Dobson can't live outside the penitentiary. He has no money, no way of making any, no place to go, no friends. You are going to throw him out of his home. You are going to torture him with the knowledge that his life was wasted in prison when he was a free man in law. You are going to destroy the Sidney family."

"Richard Dobson saw his brother," I said, "that night at the pool."

"He saw a ghost," asserted Jed. "Or if he didn't see a ghost, he must want to stay in the penitentiary. If he knew it was his brother, why didn't he demand an enquiry and his freedom? Either because he saw a ghost or because he does not want his freedom. You can have it either way you want. You are going to force him out of the only place he has to live, and you are going to give him the tragedy of knowing how his life was wrecked."

"He is a rich man," I said. "Half the old Dobson estate is his. All of it is his. His brother was legally and is now actually dead."

"You are a worse man than I was," said Jed.

"I never interfered with Mr. Sidney's scheme of punishment. You are trying to. His scheme was just."

"What's the use of this debate?" I exclaimed.
"You are morally incapable of right-doing."

"And you are a foolish collection of pious axioms," said Jed.

When we came to the penitentiary entrance, we encountered Morgan of the Metropolitan Agency. He stopped me.

"You had me fooled," he said. "I really thought you didn't know."

"I did not know," I said.

"Didn't you!" he exclaimed. "You are here to see Richard Dobson. I followed my hunch. I have the answer to this thing. I know why this man Sidney never was younger than twenty years. You are here to see Richard Dobson because you are representing Arthur Dobson."

"Arthur Dobson is dead," I said.

"I know he is—as a name; but he is alive as Sidney."

"Mr. Sidney is dead," I said. "We have come here to tell Richard Dobson that he can go free. I did not know who Arthur Dobson was until last night."

As Morgan stood before us on the penitentiary steps, I thought how true had been my conception of him as the inevitable. Mr. Sidney had out-

played fate, but it was by using the trump-card death.

Morgan's face showed some unpleasant lines.

"What do you mean that Sidney is dead?" he asked.

"He died Christmas night. I read his diary last night. Jed gave it to me. It is the one Dravada tried to steal. We came here at once to tell Richard Dobson."

"Let his brother Arthur tell him. Richard is dead," said Morgan, going on down the steps. "But I am not through with you people. Publicity is just as good now as it was before."

He got into an automobile and was driven away.

"Something always happens to these moral consciences," said Jed savagely. "You'll learn life some day, young fellow. Now keep your mouth shut inside here."

The warden told us that Richard Dobson had died the night before. He had sustained a great shock the night he walked out of the penitentiary and was found on Mr. Sidney's grounds. The adventure not only overtaxed him physically, but it had affected his imagination. When the guards found him, after the message from Hartley House, he was incoherent and in a fever.

He never regained strength or rationality. He had been quiet at times, but at other times was in

delirium. When delirious, he suffered chiefly from the delusion that he had seen his brother's ghost.

He died slowly and in great misery, the warden said. His deliriums were anguished.

"Now keep your mouth shut, you fool," Jed ordered—by merely prodding me in the ribs.

The warden was affected by the news of Mr. Sidney's death. He remembered him as the pleasant man who had called one day. It seemed to me that our visit, so shortly after Mr. Sidney's death, must appear as a thing strangely without purpose to the warden, but Jed was so apparently right in asking for silence at this time that I yielded to his prudential course.

The right and wrong of the Dobson affair was in the grave. Our departure from the penitentiary was awkward, I thought. The warden did not seem to find it so.

On the way back Jed presented, viciously, the sharp edges of our trouble.

"You have that fellow Morgan to deal with," he said. "If you are going to be moralistic, you will ruin the lives of two ladies who have trusted you. Morgan has to be bought. You are not doing any one any hurt now. You are not keeping an innocent man in the penitentiary. You are not disturbing justice or defeating punishment. You are taking the surest means to the protection of the innocent by bribing this man to silence."

Of all the obvious things I might have said to this man who for a long time had terrorised the Sidney household, none seemed pertinent. They would have been imprecations and reproaches. They would have dealt with the past. He, as if he had a clean slate, was dealing with the future. It did Mrs. Sidney and Isobel no good to tell Jed that he had been a rascal and was unfit to advise.

"If you go to Mrs. Sidney," said Jed, "she will sacrifice herself and everybody else. Go to Miss Sidney and tell her that the family must pay Mr. Morgan twenty thousand dollars. He'll want fifty thousand dollars. He'll take twenty. Give it to him in five annual installments. At the end of five years he'll be harmless. You and Miss Sidney will have established yourselves, and Morgan's story will be a dried-up walnut."

The proposal was so repulsive that I did not answer Jed. He said a great deal more in a great deal of bitterness, chiefly against me and what he conceived to be my moralistic ideas.

When we had returned to Hartley House, Jed said:

"Do at least one thing: ask Miss Sidney what she prefers."

I had no right and no inclination to make a decision which concerned the family and not me. I did not want to speak to Mrs. Sidney—Jed was right: her conscience might permit only the answer

which would expose the family to consequences. I spoke to Isobel.

We compromised with Morgan. Jed again was right. Morgan wanted fifty thousand dollars. He took twenty thousand dollars.

Isobel had been insistent. She had been impatient of any suggestion that there could be anything immoral or dangerous in such compromising. Feminine morals are selfishly protective of things near and dear. A generalised immorality, an unembodied immorality, is to women unimportant. It is less than unimportant; it is impossible; it does not exist. This is a part of the instinct which nourishes and protects the infant.

"I don't understand you at all, John," she said. "Is there any question in your mind that we ought to protect my father's memory and my mother's peace of mind? You admit that even now this man Morgan can wreck the things we hold dearest. You admit that a small payment can protect these things. You know that the one thing of which we have more than we need is money, and you admit that we are not doing any person any harm by using it to bribe this man Morgan."

Of course I had to give in.

CHAPTER L

MR. SIDNEY was buried by the pool on a bitter afternoon when the snow creaked underfoot, and the sun, in a cold blue sky to the southwest above the hills across the river, could hardly be regarded as a warm and sustaining star.

The servants were pallbearers—sad ones; and we had the chaplain from the penitentiary to read the service in the room Mr. Sidney had used. The sun came in the southwestern windows, and the canaries sang. Algol was afraid of strangers and hid himself. Otherwise it was Mr. Sidney's room.

We carried the coffin the half-mile in the bitter cold to the grave which had been dug by the pool with mattocks through the frozen earth. Mrs. Sidney took my arm but walked the distance bravely. Isobel went as if she were a clear-eyed Spartan girl accepting life without a quaver or whimper, upon the terms offered. We left the remains of our gracious gentleman there.

So genial a man could not die. He still pervaded the house. He had impregnated it. His death could not destroy his influence. Even his room, his death-chamber, remained jovial; but

Algol attached himself to Isobel and could not be parted from her. He went to her room that night.

Necessity and delicacy both suggested that I go away for a while the following morning. It was necessary for me to establish myself in the city, in material and physical facts of lodging, and so forth, and delicacy intimated that I was an alien in the household upon a strangely fictitious standing.

I went away in the early morning, leaving word that I would return in a day or two to say good-bye. I came back the evening of the second day, by automobile from the city. I had been impelled to go back and had so far resisted the compulsion that I had missed train-time. Then the impulse reasserted itself so irresistibly that I took an automobile for the forty-mile ride.

Jed met me at the door. His cordiality was unforced. It was the dinner-hour. Jed suggested either some biscuits and sherry in my room or an omelet with mushrooms. Mrs. Sidney, he said, had been Spartan, but was in collapse. Miss Sidney was somewhere about—he did not know where.

I did not want anything to eat and went toward the library. Isobel was sitting there by the fire.

I had often seen her thus before. It was one of the familiar pictures I should remember. There were probably a half-dozen others—none better than this.

She looked up as I entered.

"I am glad you are back, John," she said.

I could think only of a commonplace.

"I did not intend to disturb you," I said. "How is your mother?"

"Utterly and happily stupefied," said Isobel. "Her pain waits for her."

"And yourself?"

"I can't find a tragedy in it," she said. "I feel a sense of terrible but inevitable loss. I had reconciled myself to it. I can't be a sentimental rebel against life. His life was happy to the end. He would hate us if we were morose. Please sit down, John."

I did, in a comfortable chair. We looked at the fire.

"I'll be saying good-bye to-morrow," I said.

"What are you going to do?"

"I have made some arrangements. I'll build up a small practice. I may go to a small town. I think that would suit me. I haven't the temperament for a city. It is chill."

"You have really set yourself back by coming here," she suggested.

"Possibly," I admitted, "in purely material ways; but I have lived the wonder-time of my life here. The sacrifice was cheap."

"But it was a sacrifice."

"In a strictly pragmatic fashion, yes."

"You think of it as a sacrifice."

"I do not. I think of it as my real life. The rest of my existence will be the sacrifice."

"You are a simple sort of a person, John."

"I presume so. I have no reason to think otherwise."

"Where did you get your ideas of women, John?"

"I have no ideas of women. I am not presumptuous or, in that fashion, egotistic."

"Yes, you are," she said.

"I don't think you are right in saying that."

"You are presumptuous about me."

"I am not!" I exclaimed in hurt pride.

"You are," she said. "You presume that I am not in love with you."

THE END

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